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Mercredi
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CONTENTS / TABLE DES MATIÈRES

Wednesday 6 December 2017 / Mercredi 6 décembre 2017

ORDERS OF THE DAY / ORDRE DU JOUR

Strengthening Protection for Ontario Consumers Act, 2017, Bill 166, Ms. MacCharles / Loi de 2017 sur le renforcement de la protection des consommateurs ontariens, projet de loi 166, Mme MacCharles	
Hon. Yasir Naqvi	6893
Mr. Jim McDonell.....	6893
Mr. Wayne Gates	6898
Third reading debate deemed adjourned.....	6903

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS / PRÉSENTATION DES VISITEURS

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky	6903
Hon. Michael Coteau	6903
Ms. Soo Wong.....	6903
Ms. Sylvia Jones	6904
Ms. Cheri DiNovo.....	6904
Ms. Sophie Kiwala.....	6904
Mr. Jeff Yurek.....	6904
Mme Nathalie Des Rosiers.....	6904
Mr. Raymond Sung Joon Cho.....	6904
Mr. Taras Natyshak.....	6904
Hon. Mitzie Hunter	6904
Wearing of pins	
Hon. Indira Naidoo-Harris	6904
Visitors	
Mr. Arthur Potts	6904

ORAL QUESTIONS / QUESTIONS ORALES

Energy policies	
Mr. Todd Smith.....	6904
Hon. Brad Duguid.....	6905
Northern transportation	
Mr. Victor Fedeli.....	6905
Hon. David Zimmer	6906
Mr. Norm Miller	6906
Hon. Charles Sousa.....	6906
Mr. Ross Romano	6906
Hon. Bill Mauro	6906
Energy policies	
Mr. John Vanthof.....	6907
Hon. Brad Duguid.....	6907
Energy policies	
Mr. John Vanthof.....	6907
Hon. Brad Duguid	6907

Minimum wage

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson	6908
Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn	6908

Government advertising

Mr. Wayne Gates	6909
Hon. Brad Duguid	6909

Violence against women

Ms. Sophie Kiwala	6910
Hon. Indira Naidoo-Harris	6910

Highway safety

Mr. Steve Clark	6910
Hon. Steven Del Duca.....	6910

Group homes

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky.....	6911
Hon. Eric Hoskins	6911

Landlords

Mr. Jack McLaren	6912
Hon. Peter Z. Milczyn	6912

Economic development

Ms. Ann Hoggarth.....	6912
Hon. Brad Duguid	6913

Group homes

Ms. Laurie Scott	6913
Hon. Michael Coteau.....	6913

Liquor licensing

Mr. Percy Hatfield.....	6914
Hon. Charles Sousa	6914

Hospital funding

Mr. Arthur Potts	6914
Hon. Eric Hoskins	6915

Visitors

Hon. Mitzie Hunter	6915
--------------------------	------

Annual report, Auditor General

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac)	6915
-------------------------------------	------

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS / PRÉSENTATION DES VISITEURS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac)	6915
-------------------------------------	------

Financial statements, Auditor General

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac)	6915
-------------------------------------	------

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS / DÉCLARATIONS DES DÉPUTÉS

Northern Ontario

Mr. Victor Fedeli.....	6915
------------------------	------

PETITIONS / PÉTITIONS	
Violence against women	
Ms. Jennifer K. French.....	6915
Co-operative movement / Mouvement coopératif	
Mme Nathalie Des Rosiers.....	6916
Violence against women	
Ms. Lisa M. Thompson	6916
Energy policies	
Mrs. Lisa Gretzky	6916
Maureen Prinsloo	
Ms. Soo Wong.....	6916
Diagnostic services	
Mr. Ross Romano	6917
Community newspapers	
Ms. Sophie Kiwala.....	6917
Long-term care	
Mr. Norm Miller	6917
 REPORTS BY COMMITTEES / RAPPORTS DES COMITÉS	
Standing Committee on Public Accounts	
Mr. Ernie Hardeman	6918
Debate adjourned	6918
Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills	
Mr. Ted McMeekin.....	6918
Report adopted	6918
 INTRODUCTION OF BILLS / DÉPÔT DES PROJETS DE LOI	
Co-operative Corporations Amendment Act (Audit Exemptions and limits to Non-member Business), 2017, Bill 187, Mme Des Rosiers / Loi de 2017 modifiant la Loi sur les sociétés coopératives (dispenses de vérification et plafonnement du volume d'affaires réalisé avec des non-membres), projet de loi 187, Mme Des Rosiers	
First reading agreed to.....	6918
Mme Nathalie Des Rosiers.....	6918
608524 Ontario Inc. Act, 2017, Bill Pr78, Mr. Crack	
First reading agreed to.....	6919
 STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES / DÉCLARATIONS MINISTÉRIELLES ET RÉPONSES	
National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women	
Hon. Indira Naidoo-Harris	6919
Ms. Laurie Scott.....	6920
Ms. Andrea Horwath.....	6921
 PETITIONS / PÉTITIONS	
Landfill	
Mr. Ernie Hardeman.....	6921
Pharmacare	
Miss Monique Taylor	6922
Services for persons with disabilities	
Mr. Rick Nicholls.....	6922
Child care	
Mme France Gélinas	6922
Curriculum	
Ms. Sophie Kiwala	6923
School closures	
Mr. Todd Smith.....	6923
Long-term care	
Miss Monique Taylor	6923
Employment standards	
Mr. Lou Rinaldi.....	6923
Highway improvement	
Mr. Rick Nicholls.....	6924
Long-term care	
Mme France Gélinas	6924
Employment standards	
Ms. Sophie Kiwala	6924
Guide and service animals	
Mr. Victor Fedeli.....	6924
 ORDERS OF THE DAY / ORDRE DU JOUR	
Building Better Communities and Conserving Watersheds Act, 2017, Bill 139, Mr. Mauro / Loi de 2017 visant à bâtir de meilleures collectivités et à protéger les bassins hydrographiques, projet de loi 139, M. Mauro	
Ms. Cindy Forster.....	6925
Mr. James J. Bradley	6927
Mr. Rick Nicholls.....	6928
Mrs. Lisa Gretzky.....	6928
Mr. Joe Dickson	6928
Ms. Cindy Forster.....	6929
Mr. Jack MacLaren	6929
Mr. Victor Fedeli.....	6931
Ms. Cheri DiNovo	6931
Hon. Bill Mauro	6931
Mr. Rick Nicholls.....	6932
Mr. Jack MacLaren	6932
Mr. Norm Miller.....	6932
Mrs. Lisa Gretzky.....	6935
Hon. Kathryn McGarry	6935
Mr. Victor Fedeli.....	6936
Ms. Cheri DiNovo	6936

Mr. Norm Miller	6936	Ms. Cheri DiNovo	6940
Mrs. Lisa Gretzky	6937	Hon. Kathryn McGarry	6940
Hon. Bill Mauro	6939	Mrs. Lisa Gretzky.....	6941
Mr. Ross Romano	6940	Third reading debate deemed adjourned	6941

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 6 December 2017

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 6 décembre 2017

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Good morning. Please join me in prayer.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

STRENGTHENING PROTECTION FOR ONTARIO CONSUMERS ACT, 2017 LOI DE 2017 SUR LE RENFORCEMENT DE LA PROTECTION DES CONSOMMATEURS ONTARIENS

Mr. Naqvi, on behalf of Ms. MacCharles, moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 166, An Act to amend or repeal various Acts and to enact three new Acts with respect to the construction of new homes and ticket sales for events / Projet de loi 166, Loi modifiant ou abrogeant diverses lois et édictant trois nouvelles lois en ce qui concerne la construction de logements neufs et la vente de billets d'événements.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further debate?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Speaker, I believe that the parliamentary assistant for the minister will be making her remarks later in the debate.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further debate?

Mr. Jim McDonell: It is a pleasure to offer my final remarks on Bill 166 as it comes to third reading before us. I participated in the committee hearings both during the public deputations on the bill and of course during the clause-by-clause consideration. The concerns of the PC caucus and many stakeholders who warned of the failure of this bill to address key issues in the industry it affects have gone unaddressed by the government. It is only right for us at this point in time to point out some of these issues before the government proclaims this bill into legislation.

First and foremost, the portions of Bill 166 that reform new home warranties in Ontario only reflect some of the outcomes of the Cunningham report. Justice Cunningham was commissioned by this government to look into Tarion and the administration of new home warranties. The minister at the time seemed to want to predetermine the review's outcome when he said they expected the review to find Tarion doing a good job and meeting expectations of protecting consumers. To say he missed the mark would have been an understatement. Justice Cunningham built an unassailable argument that Tarion was not doing its job and was beset by a persuasive conflict of loyalties arising from its structure.

It was the only avenue for new home builders to be licensed and for consumers to receive compensation for shoddy building work. As the administrative authority, Tarion had the majority of its board of directors composed of the same people it regulated, licensed and from whose common warranty fund it paid consumers who complained about the builders' work.

Tarion wore too many hats, out of sight of the government, that for over a decade allowed Tarion to drift apart from government leadership and oversight. It was shielded from key accountability legislation, including such measures as the Auditor General's oversight, which the government rejected again when they had the opportunity to insert it into Tarion's governing legislation during the clause-by-clause.

Tarion, like any other administrative authority within this ministry, mandates that businesses practicing in the field it regulates become members and pay substantial fees to the regulator. Membership of Tarion is not by choice and any agency with such a captive constituency should be made transparent and accountable.

Justice Cunningham hit the nail on the head when he recommended removing part of Tarion's mandate, to begin expunging the conflict of loyalties that existed within it. Under Bill 166, the decisions regarding warranty payouts will be made—

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Point of order.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Speaker, I'd like to know if we have a quorum.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Clerks' table?

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Valerie Quioc Lim): Speaker, a quorum is not present.

The Acting Speaker ordered the bells rung.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Valerie Quioc Lim): Speaker, a quorum is present.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Continue, the member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry.

Mr. Jim McDonell: Under Bill 166, the decisions regarding warranty payouts will be made by another agency, to be designated at a later date, while Tarion or another corporation will take over as the regulator of the building industry. We agree with that.

What we disagree with is the way the government decided to neutralize most other suggestions brought forward by the report. The justice stated very clearly that new home warranties are not a natural monopoly and therefore should be opened up for private sector insurers,

as we've seen done in the western provinces with great success.

The justice also put great emphasis on independent dispute resolution when disputes surrounding a home warranty payment arise. The reason for this is clear: The warranty authority collects money from builders for the warranty fund, and has an interest in preserving this fund and, thus, to minimize the payouts out of it.

This was a major consumer complaint against Tarion itself. It spent so much energy arguing and frustrating consumer complaints that people gave up, due to the time and costs involved in actually having their rights enforced.

You cannot have a truly impartial warranty system without an independent adjudicator. Fighting the warranty authority's argument for denying a claim should not be done by assessing whose legal pockets are the deepest but by assessing whose argument is the strongest.

Justice Cunningham laid out a well-thought-out framework. When disputes with the warranty authority arise, the matter would be referred to independent dispute resolution, and the appointed mediator or arbitrator would be able to hire an independent expert to ascertain the facts around the claim and have the costs borne by the authority.

The government implemented no part of this dispute resolution framework. The only nod to it was a provision that allows the authority to offer alternative dispute resolution if it so wishes.

The authority's ability to raise and retain funds is significant. There is no reason for them to opt for a cheaper and more consumer-friendly dispute resolution process when the default option is action at the Licence Appeal Tribunal and the courts, where litigants, especially self-represented ones, are at a disadvantage.

The government's inaction on most of Justice Cunningham's recommendations is deplorable enough, but the method by which they worked to suppress the justice's report and its guidance compounds the problem.

Reviews by independent professionals often find hidden and not-so-hidden flaws in agencies and programs that the government would rather not be revealed. When such damning reviews come out and recommend change, the government of the day has two options: Adopt the change, or reject the change. They hold the ultimate power, as is proper to the majority of democratically elected representatives, to say yes or no, and they owe it to Ontarians to state such a position clearly.

For all his flaws, the former Minister of Health, George Smitherman, embodies on the government side the positive trait of owning up to exercising government discretion. When the Sharkey report recommended a minimum standard of care, he explicitly said no and took upon himself, as the minister responsible, the consequences of such a policy decision.

This crop of ministers is different. Instead of saying no, they outsource their responsibility to be accountable to Ontarians to a hand-picked, secretive working group. We heard from the only consumer on the group, on the

record, during committee. We heard of the outright dismissal of the justice's recommendations, the swearing of participants to secrecy, and the pervasive atmosphere of a preordained outcome completely alien to the spirit of the justice's proposals.

0910

The government cannot hide its neglect of the Cunningham recommendations behind the working group's smokescreen. They did not want Tarion changed. They did not want its flaws aired out for all to see, and when the report hit them like a ton of bricks, they sought to control the fallout and preserve whatever benefits of the old system they could.

The PC caucus submitted reasonable amendments to address the lack of accountability, the lack of competition and the lack of independent dispute resolution mechanisms in Bill 166's reform of Tarion. All of our amendments were in the spirit of the justice's desired direction for new home warranties in Ontario, and all of our amendments could be adopted without compromising the government's focus on keeping the monopoly system for the time being.

Our amendments concerning enrolment of new homes and builds in the plan sought to ensure that the government-mandated plan could continue to exist, and certain private insurers' plans could be designated by regulation as equivalent and thus eligible to compete with it in the future. If the government chose not to allow private insurers into the market, it could simply fail to pass the regulations enabling the private sector provision of home warranties and leave the framework a monopoly, as it would have been anyway.

Justice Cunningham recommended that Ontario follow the lead of the three western provinces where home warranties are not a government monopoly. We agreed that it was time to enable a future government to undertake such a transition. The present government, instead, chose to reject the amendment outright.

Unlike administrative authorities, insurance companies are subject to strict oversight by financial regulators, have very stringent capitalization and solvency requirements, and are subject to dispute resolution mechanisms that are far superior to those proposed in this bill for the warranty authority. Moreover, insurers are subject to an independent ombudsman service, unlike the warranty authority whose ombudsman will be internal.

I received a copy of the General Insurance Ombudsman Service annual report in the mail this week, and I read through it to examine how they handle cases where there are disputes between the consumer and the insurer. I found a particularly interesting case. It's very representative, as it concerns buildings, repairs and proper service. We have case study 3, and I'll just read part of the resolution.

"The insurer initially questioned whether the mould was caused by the improper repairs, or was a pre-existing condition and not caused by the sewer backup. Also they questioned their responsibility for the actions of the restoration contractor.

"The case escalated to mediation, where further investigation confirmed that there was no pre-existing mould, and that this was caused by the initial work of the restoration contractor. An agreement was reached during mediation resulting in the insurer paying an additional amount above the policy limit for sewer backup. This also reflected the obligation an insurer has to ensure that repairs done on its behalf by a contractor must be done correctly."

It just goes to show that in the insurance industry, there is a system that protects the consumer, unlike what we're seeing here in this government's Bill 166.

That's a dispute resolution system we can support. It is a pity that the government would not give Ontario consumers that option.

We submitted a further amendment that would have given consumers the upper hand when deciding whether to resolve a dispute independently or through the Licence Appeal Tribunal and the courts.

Participants in the Cunningham review highlighted the depth of their distrust of Tarion, its procedures and its officers. It was incumbent upon this government to give consumers a dispute resolution process that they could trust, which the government failed to do. Leaving independent dispute resolution as a gift of the warranty authority, rather than as a consumer's right, does nothing to help restore trust in a system that has been beset by conflict and distrust for decades.

Other opposition amendments that the government chose to reject included specific oversight and transparency measures for both the builder regulator and the warranty authority, including making them subject to freedom-of-information requests. Freedom of information is an essential tool for transparency, allowing the members of the public and the media to peel away the veil of secrecy that surrounds many government decisions.

When such decisions, including regulation-making powers, are outsourced to an arm's-length agency such as Tarion, the TSSA, the ESA and other delegated authorities, the need for transparency becomes even more urgent.

After the Cunningham report was released, the Minister of Government and Consumer Services admitted that Tarion had drifted too far away from government oversight and leadership, appropriating to itself prerogatives and mandates that should belong to the government alone.

It would be too easy to blame the situation that Justice Cunningham uncovered at Tarion on Tarion itself, the industry, its stakeholders or someone else, yet this issue was allowed to simmer and grow over the course of many years of a failure by this government to reign in self-regulating agencies and to listen to the many complaints by consumer advocates and licensees alike.

During my tenure as critic of this portfolio, I have met with stakeholders who have said in no uncertain terms that the delegated agencies were either not doing their job or keeping everybody in the dark about how they actually

administered the delegated legislation. Meanwhile, the agencies continue to exact high membership and compliance fees with little or no transparency on how they are to be spent. Those among the insiders who are willing to speak off the record would often confirm the need for reform and for transparency yet also concede that such initiatives would not go far in the current legislative climate. This was an abdication of leadership by a government that has forgotten that when it comes to industrial self-regulation, the prerogative to lead, instruct and direct rests with the government.

Complaints about the way Tarion was managed and operated had been pouring in for years, yet the government's talking points on the beginning of the Cunningham review endorsed the status quo—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I'd just like to remind the member from Niagara Falls that when he enters the chamber and leaves he is supposed to acknowledge the Chair.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Thank you. I appreciate that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you.

Mr. Jim McDonell: Complaints about the way Tarion was managed and operated had been pouring in for years, yet the government's talking points at the beginning of the Cunningham review endorsed the status quo. Someone was clearly out of the loop.

How the government manages the transition from Tarion to the new regulator and warranty provider model will determine whether this model will succeed or not. They have taken a modest lead in splitting Tarion in the future and restoring control over Tarion's regulation-making powers in the interim, but just passing legislation is not enough. There will need to be a constant vigilance by the government on consumers' behalf to ensure that the new authorities comply with the mandate and act in accordance with the public interest principles they are supposed to serve.

Ontario's economy as well as economies across the world depend on a healthy construction sector. Aging housing stock needs to be replaced, desirable communities need to welcome new residents, and rental and new ownership supply in the GTA needs to be greatly enhanced. All of these objectives require strong builders and confident consumers. We can't have either without a trusted regulator and a trusted warranty framework that would assure consumers that their largest investment is safe.

The government's proposals on Tarion reform fall dramatically short of the reforms contemplated by Justice Cunningham and of consumers' expectations. Through the committee, we proposed a number of amendments to achieve what we believe to be the bare minimum of an acceptable solution to Tarion's shortcomings. The government defeated all of these amendments.

Bill 166 also makes sweeping changes to the entertainment industry in Ontario, and I would like to dedicate a few moments to examining the potential unintended consequences of the new Ticket Sales Act, as outlined in Bill 166.

The government took action on ticket selling several times, most recently by relaxing regulations under the Ticket Speculation Act to permit the resale of tickets above face value. The reason behind this action was clear: if legal resale avenues are, by law, less profitable for the ticket holder than the underground market—often operated through cash, in-person, unverified and unverifiable transactions—the majority of tickets in search of another owner will gravitate towards the market where no price caps are in effect.

Beyond concerns regarding new ticket-buying technology and fairness, event tickets are no different from any other good for which there is a limited supply and demand that far outstrips it. Many fans are willing to pay prices far above those charged by event organizers and artists. In this reality, ticket resale becomes a profitable business for those with the technology and the time to sweep up large quantities of desirable tickets for the sole purpose of diverting them to a secondary market.

0920

Let's agree on one principle: Event tickets are not an investment security that one buys with the hope of selling for a profit. The secondary market for tickets exists ostensibly to serve certain very identifiable demographics. First, there is the consumer who can't attend the event they planned to be at for whatever reason. The second category is holders of so-called holdback tickets who need to get rid of them.

Holdbacks are a constant point of contention amongst advocates for consumer interests in the ticketing industry and major event organizers. A holdback is a ticket that isn't put up for sale, but given to an artist or sponsor, a radio station, a mobile operator, a charity, a credit card company or some other entity for distribution.

The reasons for holding back tickets are numerous, and often many of them are legitimate. The issue lies in the quantity and proportion of the holdbacks. If I am an average consumer looking to purchase a ticket to an event, I would prefer to know whether I have a better chance of getting a ticket by waiting patiently at my computer for the tickets to go on sale, or whether I am better off buying through my credit card company or calling the radio station.

Some events reported that up to 75% of the tickets had gone on pre-sale or pre-distribution outside ordinary public sales, creating an artificial shortage of tickets that could be bought by actual fans. We heard clear requests from stakeholders in the ticket industry to disclose the actual number of tickets that will be put up for sale. This would serve two purposes. First, it would strengthen the principle of transparency in ticket sales by ensuring consumers know how many tickets will be available from the primary seller. Second, it would serve as a deterrent to the event organizers from holding back what many consumers would consider an unreasonable amount of tickets.

The government seemed to be on the right track when they drafted such a provision in Bill 166. The objections to this transparency measure came primarily from large

event organizers, whose arguments were found, quite frankly, less than convincing. Ticket-buying bots perform thousands, if not millions, of operations per second, and future computing power increases are likely to bring this speed up even further. The seating charts for venues are well known and publicly available on platforms like Ticketmaster, even before the tickets go on sale. Whether an organizer discloses how many or which tickets go on sale or don't go on sale, a millisecond-long attempt at buying a ticket is all a bot needs. If it fails because a ticket is not available, the bot simply moves on before you or I had the opportunity to even think about it.

Bots are the problem. Bulk-buying practices are the problem.

As Bill 166 made its way through the Legislature, the CBC ran several stories regarding people who allegedly made massive profits by bulk-buying event tickets and reselling them for several times their face value. When the Tragically Hip announced their 2016 tour, which turned out to be their last with Gord Downie, tickets were sold out in fractions of a second and then promptly reappeared on the secondary market.

What can we learn from these events? First, the obvious conclusion is that someone who held onto a ticket for seconds or minutes before putting it up for resale never intended to actually go to the event in the first place. These tickets were bought solely for the purpose of resale. This is a business and therefore taxable and subject to strict auditing rules, which bulk-buyers do not comply with, and it's an unfair practice at the same time.

The government can pursue these scalpers in all but name through existing legal channels, such as business tax evasion; through new channels, such as banning the use of bots; or by giving primary sellers or artists the tools to nix these behaviours themselves. Bulk-buying robs fans of the fair choice to buy a ticket at fair value and leaves traces, which I mentioned in my leadoff remarks during second reading. I will touch on them again today since none of them were addressed by the government during the amendment stage.

Digital traces can include very similar Internet protocol addresses used for transactions, the same credit card or multiple credit cards registered to the same billing address, a shortened timespan between the primary purchase and listing on the secondary market, and frequent transactions unlike those of an occasional consumer, season ticket holder, the most loyal fans or others.

The take-home message is that whatever means of bulk-buying tickets this government chooses to forbid, the scalpers will find a way to bypass the legislation. The process of drafting, revising and implementing new regulations is slow and cumbersome and can't be expected to keep pace with developing technology driven by very fast and very reliable profits.

What we need is a primary ticket marketplace that has the power to enforce ticket-buying equity, and decisively. When tickets sell out in a matter of seconds to purchasers exhibiting a pattern of bulk buying, primary sellers

should have the option of cancelling the sale and depriving the scalper of his or her goods.

All the government needs is to provide them with the confidence of legal backing should the inevitable disputes arise with disappointed profiteers. We had an amendment to that effect, a PC motion the government dismissed without so much as a word of debate. Our motion would have made it clear that if you buy in bulk and your tickets are cancelled, you would have no recourse against the primary seller when enforced.

Another amendment concerned disclosure of the seller's identity, something stakeholders pointed out to be fraught with risk if individual consumers and average fans were caught up in the net. Selling a ticket through a reputable secondary ticket platform involves a certain degree of trust and mutual guarantees, especially on the part of the secondary platform, which ensures that the purchaser does not get defrauded. If an individual consumer wishes to sell an unused ticket, their name and contact details have no importance to the final purchaser as this transaction is one of those for which the secondary ticketing framework exists. As long as the secondary platform ascertains the seller's identity, that the seller is indeed a consumer and not someone who makes a business of selling tickets on the secondary market, then disclosing the contact information to the final buyer has no impact on the security or the trustworthiness of the transaction.

If, on the other hand, the seller is a high-volume seller or a corporation that is doing business in the ticketing industry, then the final buyer deserves to know their ticket comes from someone who is neither the primary seller—i.e., the event venue—or the average consumer, such as you and me.

The government did not even consider these arguments, sat in silence, and voted against the amendment. In committee, the government members went as far as voting against amendments that would have given them flexibility in the face of the inevitable unintended consequences of this legislation. Experience in other jurisdictions shows that price caps do not work, and Ontario will be no different.

People in possession of a ticket that they do not wish to use will still be able to get top dollar for it. It makes no sense to forgo a profit by going through a legitimate online marketplace when, in reality, most scalpers on the street corner will give the ticket owner more money for the ticket in untraceable cash. The consequence of this behaviour will be the emergence of a much stronger unregulated market for tickets, with the potential for increased fraud.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Stop the clock, please. I will just remind the member from Timmins–James Bay that when he came into the chamber, he did not acknowledge the Chair. When he walked in front of the Chair over to the minister, he didn't acknowledge the Chair. When I stood up, he finally acknowledged the Chair. So please acknowledge the Chair.

Continue.

Mr. Jim McDonell: Thank you, Speaker. The consequence of this behaviour will be the emergence of a much stronger unregulated market for tickets, with the potential for increased fraud. Price controls can create two things: shortages and black markets, and sometimes both. Consumers deserve better from the government, but this government is burning bridges that it would need for the retreat.

The price cap is being set in stone in this bill, rather than being prescribed. It is a dramatic reversal from this government's general attitude to consumer legislation that would defer everything to regulations issued at the minister's office. If a price cap is shown to not work as intended, the government will likely have to submit rushed legislation to soften the cap or remove it altogether. The process can take weeks or months, as proceedings in the chamber show quite clearly. Our amendments sought to give the government a way out of this predicament. We understand their intention to impose a price cap: It is popular and it looks decisive. It is also unlikely to work.

Had our amendment passed, the government, upon realizing their miscalculation, could have issued appropriate regulations to address the issue and adjust the price cap to a level that satisfied market demand for the ticketed events. Instead, the government voted the amendment down.

0930

I gave you the example of the Air Canada Centre, where I tried to buy tickets a couple of years ago. I went to theaircanadacentre.com website and found, on checking out, that it's actually in American dollars, with a fairly hefty delivery fee from Chicago. One would not expect theaircanadacentre.com to be an American company, but that's the type of thing that happens with the Internet.

There is one good provision of the Ticket Sales Act: Everyone, bar none, agrees that the use of ticket-buying bots should be banned. Ticket sale websites use validation procedures such as CAPTCHA to prove that we are human before allowing us to make a transaction. Such a system that is designed to bypass this guarantee of an equitable ticket-buying process or any other guarantee to the same has no place in Ontario.

This ban runs into immediate limitation, acknowledged even by the Attorney General's own counsel present at the committee. Ontarians are not the only innovators in technology, and we are by far not the only consumers or businesses with computers. Ticket sales for events across the world are transacted across national and language lines, and enforcing Ontario bans abroad is an unrealistic proposition. An unscrupulous scalper could be operating from some modern tech headquarters in a country with a weak rule of law and reselling bulk-bought tickets through a ticketing platform's headquarters in the US or operated from the cloud, making enforcement all but impossible. This is another story of good intentions running amok into the brick wall of a high-tech, globalized reality.

The Ontario PC caucus supports an equitable ticket-buying process, and we would have supported good policies to that effect. What this government is about to create instead is a flourishing black market for tickets where consumers will be as protected from fraud as they are protected today from outrageous price inflation from the secondary market, i.e., not at all. We stand for getting policy right. The government instead is looking to win the next election, with little regard for what may come afterwards.

The solution to rampant, large-volume buying of event tickets for profit is a strong co-operation between the artist, organizers, primary sellers and secondary ticketing platforms to ensure only the intended clients use these tools. Ticket buying for profit should not be a business. Tickets can be purchased for distribution across a network of concierges, for instance, or for inclusion in a tour package. These are legitimate uses that do not involve a simple business proposition of buying tickets and reselling them at three times the value.

Moreover, such arrangements should be negotiated with the event organizers and these tickets issued as a proportion of the holdbacks, not sniped from consumers waiting for the minute tickets go on sale. Bulk buying is unfair to consumers as it is unfair to artists, who see none of the benefits of the great demand for tickets for their shows. It is a wealth transfer on a massive scale to people who have no business in entertainment and potentially to financial havens with lax tax regimes.

The Tragically Hip debacle gave the government the impetus to look at ticket sales in Ontario and to fix the system to make it fair for fans. They managed to reduce the transparency in the process and potentially lay the groundwork to return to the black market. We cannot stand for this.

Speaker, I know my time is up, as I have another colleague who wants to speak on this. The government has failed to bring this legislation to a level that we feel will protect the interests of Ontarians or ticket buyers. We will not be supporting this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Mr. Wayne Gates: I'm glad to rise and speak on Bill 166. I think this is the end of speaking on the bill. Thank you for allowing me to rise and speak today on third reading of Bill 166.

We've done a lot of work on this bill, and there has been a lot of input to get us to where we are today. There are a few aspects of this bill, the Tarion portion and the ticket portion, where we see some successes but also some serious flaws. I'm going to go over those today.

What I can really say here is that the Liberals missed a very good opportunity to fix a serious problem in the province of Ontario. These are not opportunities they didn't hear about. They missed chances to correct the wrongs that have been occurring and will continue to occur in the province of Ontario. While moving forward on these topics is absolutely important, I am just let down that so much evidence and thoughtful work that was provided to them was ultimately missed.

I'm going to start with the biggest portion of this bill and the part of this bill that has likely received the most media attention: Tarion reform.

Let me start with the biggest item that was left out of the bill, and that is a focus on protecting consumers who buy newly built homes. That's what this was supposed to be about: protecting consumers.

Winter is coming on, and anyone who has spent some time outside knows that the weather is getting colder. This is the time of year when we begin to hear a lot of complaints about Tarion. That's because the wind gets colder and starts rushing through people's homes, and that's when they realize they bought a new home that wasn't properly built.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Timmins—James Bay is warned.

Go ahead.

Mr. Wayne Gates: So they turn to Tarion, or they try to fight to get their property fixed properly, and they run into the failing system that exists today and, quite frankly, has existed for a number of years in the province of Ontario.

When we're talking about what I'm going to talk about today, I want you to think about that situation as it gets colder. Imagine your kids are at home, freezing in the brand new home you just paid a fortune to buy. Or maybe it's worse; maybe there is leaking occurring in the house, and the basement is entirely covered in mould. Maybe it's cold; maybe it smells bad. Either way, the one place you're supposed to be comfortable becomes a nightmare to live in every day.

You haven't done anything wrong. All you've done is work hard your entire life, save enough money and buy a house.

So when a government sees a situation like this, how do they not take the side of the consumer, the side of the family and, quite frankly, the side of the community? How do they see people losing their livelihoods and bankrupting themselves trying to get justice, and decide not to act? How do they see a situation like that and not use every tool in their power to right this awful wrong?

These stories aren't new in this place. The PCs have been hearing them, the Liberals have been hearing them and the NDP has been hearing about them. Everywhere you go, if you're knocking on doors, you're hearing about what's going on in our neighbourhoods as we all see houses being built in our communities.

These stories aren't new. These stories were the stories I raised during the second reading of this bill. These stories were raised by my colleagues in the NDP: Jagmeet Singh and, before him, Rosario Marchese. Both of these men were brilliant legislators who brought forward strong and smart laws to protect people, laws that were ignored by this government for a number of years.

So when this government put Bill 166 forward, we all thought we saw a space where we could work together, where we could reach across the aisle and put into prac-

tice what so many people had brought to our attention. Unfortunately, as most of the amendments we put forward were voted down by the Liberal Party, this did not happen.

Mr. Speaker, make no mistake about it: Change has to happen. People in this Legislature have to listen.

The way that Tarion is set up today, and the way that consumers are gouged and left stranded, is fundamentally flawed, and we owe it to our constituents to right this wrong.

This bill could do so much more for the people of the province of Ontario. You can simply look at the amendments we put forward, if you want to understand how this bill could be much stronger, and how consumers, unfortunately, were ignored.

Mr. Speaker, here is a handful of amendments that the NDP put forward which were shot down by the Liberal Party. I'm going to read them out because I think it's important. I think it's important for the Liberal caucus who are here today to hear these.

The act's purposes to include promoting the construction of properly built new homes: Somebody on that side tell me what was wrong with that. Don't we all want to have homes that are built properly?

0940

The act's purposes to include providing timely and useful information to new homebuyers about builder and vendor performance, and that that information be made available easily and on time—I'm asking my colleagues: What's wrong with that amendment? There's no cost to that amendment. All it's doing is protecting consumers who have worked their entire lives to try to buy a home in the province of Ontario.

This is interesting, because I'm subject to this, Mr. Speaker, and I know that you will be interested in this because you're subject to this as well: The newly created authorities be subject to the Public Sector Salary Disclosure Act, known as the sunshine list—what's wrong with that? Do you see anything wrong with that, Mr. Speaker? I don't think you would.

Allow the minister to require qualifications for board members of designated corporations and to ensure that there is some degree of consumer protection there: There's no cost to that, but it makes the bill stronger. It got voted down.

All of schedule 4 to come into force upon royal assent, not proclamation: We know that all this does is push it past the election; that's what that's about. What we said is, if this is important for consumers who have waited 10, 15 or 20 years to get this bill done, why not get it done immediately? Why are we pushing it out to 2020, 2021 or 2022? Our consumers need help today. Our families need help today.

The fifth one may sound confusing to some people but it's important. It's important because that difference is the difference between these changes taking effect as soon as the bill has passed or them taking effect after the election. That's what I tried to explain, just a little bit there, Mr. Speaker. You see, if the bill is enforced upon

royal assent, then that's as soon as it has passed. So it gets passed—it's probably going to get passed here maybe tomorrow or the day after or next week, but I know it's going to get passed soon. The other option allows the ministry to drag their heels, and we all know what that means: 2020, 2021, 2022 or 2023.

We have been calling for Tarion reforms for over a decade and the government has done nothing. They've done nothing to heed our calls or to protect consumers, and yet, just months before an election, suddenly your reform bill appears before the House. So if you add that up, you can see why I'm concerned about this small but significant detail. Consumers need protection today, not a decade from now, not three years from now, not five years from now.

Mr. Speaker, the minister herself has said that many parts of this bill will not come into force until 2020. We've all heard the stories. I know the way it works in here; I know a lot of people are not listening. But I know the consumers are listening at home. I know they're out there. I know they're scared to death. I know they have been fighting Tarion for years. I believe all of us have an obligation to take care of our constituents, and this bill certainly isn't going to do that.

Well, as many of you know, there's an election in 2018—and I know you guys are all going to like this part of the speech—an election, I truly believe, the NDP will win. And when we do, we won't be afraid to put consumers first.

But let me get back to my point on this bill lacking consumer protection measures. You know what? You don't need to take it from me. We stand up here and we talk. But you know the best way to talk about it is to talk about people who have been affected by it. You can talk to Barbara Captijn. In June of this year, the Minister of Government and Consumer Services set up a closed-door consultation group of 11 people, of which she was the only independent consumer advocate. To her, "The group was stacked toward Tarion representatives and those with business ties to Tarion." I didn't say that, Mr. Speaker; that's not coming from me. It's not coming from the NDP. It's coming from a person who sat on that committee and that's how she felt. So right off the bat, she says right there that the group that was supposed to provide advice on this legislation was stacked towards Tarion. I don't get it, by the way. I don't understand why we're protecting Tarion.

When she appeared before the committee, she went on to say, "I believe this is the wrong approach to take in consultations about public policy. They should not be behind closed doors and they should not be confidential."

I think that's fair, I think that's balanced, and I certainly think it's reasonable. Does anyone here disagree with that? Put your hand up, those who are listening, if you disagree with her statement—because I don't think we do. Does anyone disagree that public policy discussions should be open, transparent and represent all the residents who live within Ontario, not just the ones tied to big business?

Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Windsor West was in committee that day and asked the consumer representative, on the record, questions which I believe need to be mentioned here. On the issue of transparency, this exchange occurred:

“Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Okay. Do you feel that the working group was transparent and accountable to the public?

“Ms. Barbara Captijn: Well, we were told to be confidential about who said what. I don’t have a problem with anybody quoting me on anything I say on behalf of consumers, but apparently, that was not the wish of either the ministry or the people in the consultation group. I think that’s wrong.

“We were told to act ‘in the best interests of all Ontarians.’ If that’s what you’re doing, there’s no reason for secrecy, there’s no reason for confidentiality, because you’re acting without vested interests in the interests of Ontarians. I believe that’s the way it should have been conducted.”

To the Speaker: I appreciate you listening to what’s being said here because I think this is so important. It’s important to listen to the residents. We can all stand up here, as elected MPPs, and say whatever we want, but this is what’s being said by the residents of the province of Ontario, and we’ve got an obligation to listen—particularly to the only consumer advocate on that consultation group.

With over a decade of public outcry and so many people who have a stake in this game, why were these consultations held in secret? I ask you, Mr. Speaker—maybe you can answer that for me—why would they do that? Why were members of this group made secret? Why was the group stacked with Tarion insiders? Somebody help me out here, because I can’t answer these questions. These are all questions that I hope the government will answer, because they’re so important to consumer protection.

Mr. Speaker, there are two more exchanges between the member from Windsor West and Barbara that occurred in that committee, which I believe accurately describe what I’m getting to here.

The first is:

“Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Do you feel that the working group had proper representation for consumers, and was it a free and open process as far as properly analyzing and looking at the recommendations that had been made previously?

“Ms. Barbara Captijn: No to both of those.”

Again, that’s not me saying that; that’s somebody who lives in the province of Ontario.

The second one is:

“Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: I want to thank you for being here today. The first question I’m going to ask you is pretty straightforward: Do you feel that Bill 166 properly protects the rights of consumers?”

Do you know what she said, Mr. Speaker? She didn’t give a long-winded reply. It was one word: “No.” There you have it. A person who was asked to advise the government, who was there to debate public policy in favour

of the consumers, read the bill and made those comments.

Clearly, this government has so much more it could do for consumers. But we see how they feel about protecting them. It’s clear. Again, we’ve been raising this issue for a decade, and they only decided to act immediately before an election.

In fact, there’s an MPP in this House—and I won’t name which one, because I don’t think that’s really fair, but I think it’s fair to tell this story—who stood up here last week and said some very rude things about our party and about our hydro motion, which seeks to put a plan in place that will lower hydro bills, protect people and put hydro back into public hands. That’s how we feel.

0950

Here’s what happened here—Mr. Speaker, look at me, because this is shocking to me. He was here saying we don’t actually care about the people of Ontario, yet that same MPP blocked a consumer advocacy group on Twitter. Why did he do that? Do you know why they’re doing that, why he blocked them? They were tweeting stories of people who were struggling to deal with issues with houses they bought that weren’t properly built. Why do people do that? Mr. Speaker, and my colleagues: Why would people do that? Do you know why they do that? They’re desperate. They’ve been fighting Tarion for two, three or five years. They’ve lost their homes. People have ended up losing their homes; they can’t get mortgages. That’s why they did it. And you know what? They’re tweeting to us because it’s our job. It’s our job to try and help them.

If we’re honest with ourselves, we all know that people come to our offices every day and we all try to help them. There are some days when we can’t help, and we have to tell them that. We have to say to that constituent, “I can’t help you.” But in this issue with Tarion, nobody in this Legislature can say that we can’t help that consumer. What we have to do is take on Tarion. We’ve got to take them on and make sure they’re doing the job that they’re supposed to do. This bill doesn’t do that, completely. It certainly doesn’t.

Consumers deserve better in the province of Ontario. They’re tweeting their stories of people who are struggling to deal with issues in houses they bought that weren’t properly built. Imagine that. He tells us we’re out of touch because we put forward a hydro plan that actually works for people, and he’s blocking the public from proving to him how desperately they need his help.

I’m looking at my colleagues. I’m looking at my colleague from St. Catharines. I can go to that colleague and tell him how desperate some of the people in St. Catharines may be, and do you know what? He’s going to listen. He’s not going to block them on Twitter. He’s not going to do that. Why would an MPP do that? It’s wrong.

I hope that clarifies the issue around consumer protection. Again I point to the group Canadians for Properly Built Homes. They’re a group of hard-working citizens who are trying to get this government to do the

right thing and protect consumers. They aren't hard to find. They produce recommendations that are grounded in public policy, and they make sense. We don't always agree on every single issue, but they can be very easily approached. We can have conversations. We can work together. We can make this province better for new homebuyers and those stuck in a system that's not working. They do work with our office, and there's no doubt in my mind that they'd be happy to work with the minister to do that work here. They're open to dialogue, and they're reasonable people. The minister can work with them and make this legislation stronger.

In the event that the members in this House right now will not seek out the group, one of their members, Dr. Karen Somerville, came to us here at Queen's Park and to the committee. She told a story in the committee that I think is worth reading into the record and important for each of you to hear. This is in her words, not mine:

"I'm going to start by telling you about one of the many people suffering due to the inadequacies of the current legislation and the current model." She showed a picture of Daniel Emery. Here's the short story of Daniel's experience based on what she told us:

"In 2007, he bought a newly built home in Port Dover. There was no occupancy permit. He quickly found serious code defects, including Ontario building code violations. He contacted Tarion, and he understood that Tarion would help him. He waited for over three years for Tarion to help. Tarion did not help him.

"His insurance was cancelled due to the construction defects and mould in his home. Without insurance, Daniel could not get his mortgage renewed. Without a mortgage, his home went into foreclosure. In 2011, Daniel Emery became homeless. Daniel is still desperately seeking compensation from Tarion today.

"Bill 166 will do nothing to prevent a situation like Daniel's from happening again. Bill 166 does not provide compensation for Daniel or other families who feel that they have been wronged by Tarion. Again, Daniel's story is just one ... of many, many across Ontario."

If anyone from Tarion or the government is listening right now, Daniel still needs you. Daniel needs you to fix this situation. Daniel did nothing wrong; Tarion did. Nobody should end up homeless because of Tarion.

Instead it seems they're listening to powerful lobby groups, groups that have been lobbying for this for a long time. Make no mistake about it: They are powerful lobbying groups. Make no mistake about it. We know who they are.

Down in Niagara, we have a lot of people who work in the trades. They are some of the best trades workers anywhere in Canada. I truly believe that. When you build something locally with our local skilled trades, it gets built properly, and we know it's a safe work environment.

It's some of these same groups that have been trying to push for less and less restrictions on the amount of training and certification required to build these homes. Well, nowhere is that more evident than in some of these examples.

Do you honestly want someone wiring your house or installing a sprinkler system who isn't certified to do the work? I ask anybody here. You can yell it out—you guys like to heckle. Mr. Speaker, would you want that for your home? These are truly matters of life and death. It's about the safety of our children and our grandchildren. It may be more expensive for builders to use them, but they keep our families safe and ensure the job is done right.

When we see companies that are trying to make it easier to get around certifications or to make their complaints process so difficult that consumers abandon it, we need to look at their motivation. I can't speak for them, but it's easy to make some judgments. At the end of the day, we want people to feel safe and secure in their homes and feel that their homes are reliable. These issues are all intertwined and can't be and shouldn't be separated by any government.

There is one part of the bill I'd like to talk about in very positive terms, one part of the bill the government actually got right, and that was the support of the NDP amendment to bring Tarion under the oversight of the Auditor General. We've raised this issue numerous times in this House and actually put bills forward on this. I cannot say how proud I am to be the critic who will finally see this occur—all of this hard work to shine a light on the Tarion corporation and to show the issues we all know are occurring there have finally come through.

This measure for transparency was so important even my colleagues in the PC Party supported it. It's important because the release of the People's Guarantee and their \$6-billion budget hole prove that they are not the party that cares about transparency, but even they came around on this one and saw it was good to support it. I believe the knowledge that this amendment was accepted strengthens this bill and goes a little way to correct something that was wrong before. Obviously, we would have preferred to have this sooner, but it's better now than never.

During the second reading of this bill, I laid out a vision for what I would prefer. As mentioned, change needs to happen, and needs to happen now. People like Daniel are depending on all of us. And there are people in my riding that depend on us, too—and your ridings.

As I mentioned last time, I was doing some canvassing in my new subdivisions. I have lots of new subdivisions in Niagara Falls. Canvassing always reveals a lot about what's going on in your neighbourhoods. It's essential to me, and there are some stories that relate to the issues in this bill. These people have many of the same concerns when we go to their doors and listen to their concerns.

They wanted a new hospital built. We absolutely deserve quality and timely access to health care in Niagara Falls. We've wanted that for a long time. We need to get the shovels in the ground and get it done and get it open as soon as possible. That's a big issue at the doors in the Falls, so you expect to hear that.

Obviously, hydro rates: Decent hard-working people in Niagara are struggling to cover the cost of hydro rates. They need relief, and they need it now. So you expect to hear that at the doors.

We also heard about pollution. As a matter of fact, I raised this issue a number of times in the House—the raw sewage that's being dumped in our Niagara River—which is absolutely terrible. We deserve rivers and lakes that are swimmable, fishable and drinkable. It's inexcusable to think that people are dumping sewage into our river. Our government must act on that.

1000

So we expected that. You expect to hear about the hospital; you expect to hear about the raw sewage. It's a big issue down in the Niagara riding. We expect those things. But the one that was coming up more and more in the new subdivisions was Tarion. I was a little surprised at that, but that's what they wanted to talk about on the doorsteps. I'm knocking on doors in new subdivisions in Niagara Falls and this is what people are flagging me down about, and it's only going to happen more and more. Houses are going up. They're being built like crazy, so if you don't address this, the situation will get even worse.

Together, we've been able to do some incredible work. We've proven that when we work together, we can be an effective force and get things done. This Liberal mess can be fixed, and we can work together to make life better for people in all our communities, not just my own.

Mr. Speaker, there's another portion of the bill which I'd like to touch on before my time runs out, and that portion deals with ticket sales—something that I'm quite familiar with. There has been a lot of debate about this. I think we almost all agree that something needs to be done. We've got people here in Ontario who are trying to see sporting events or trying to see a concert and the tickets disappear before they even have a chance to buy them. We're talking about selling out in seconds. It's ridiculous.

I know my colleagues on the other side will know this story. I remember when my daughters were a lot younger, and I was working at GM at the time. I used to love taking my girls to see the Blue Jays games. It was a great day out for myself and my family. My daughters ended up being amazing ballplayers, and they loved going to see the Jays.

It boils my blood to think that people working in that plant today can't take their kids to see a Leafs game, a Jays game, maybe even a soccer game or go to an Elton John concert because computers pick up the tickets and then resell them at a higher price. Sporting events and concerts are supposed to be for everyday people. What happens when you have two or three children? You can't afford \$150 a ticket. It's just not reasonable. We know we have to handle this somehow.

Some of the provisions of this bill work, but once again we offered solutions that would make the provisions even stronger. The one that I thought was really good was the provision that would require a venue—now think about this—to release how many tickets were on sale to the general public. Does anybody in here not think that's fair and reasonable, to know how many tickets are actually going to be available to the public? For example,

if a venue had 20,000 tickets, they would need to reveal that only 8,000 or 9,000 ever went on sale.

We always expect that some tickets will be what they call "holdbacks." I don't know if anybody has heard that word before, but that's what it's called. These are tickets meant for the VIPs, family members, friends, radio stations—things like that. The issue is, when there are so few tickets being sold, demand goes up. When tickets reappear on the secondary market, they are almost unaffordable for our families to take our kids and our grandkids.

Mr. Speaker, during the debate on this bill, I had people contact my office and tell me they knew that venues were withholding up to 90% of the tickets they had. The general public never even gets the opportunity to buy tickets. When we make public how many tickets they sell, we know it's transparent. I raised the question on this, so I think it's fair and I think it's balanced to raise it again today. At one point, we actually agreed on this, meaning the Liberals and us agreed. The provision was in the original bill, which we supported. But then the pressure came and the lobbyists came, and suddenly the provision was removed from the bill. Mr. Speaker, I actually questioned the minister about this in the House during question period. I still believe it makes sense and it should be there.

I can prove it's a problem, and I think I'll do that. I have a few minutes left.

During the committee hearings on this bill the representative from StubHub was asked if tickets appear for the first time directly on their site instead of ever being released to the public. Do you understand what that means? The tickets for the event are on StubHub before they are ever released to the public. You know what his response was to that? I was surprised by it, by the way, I'll be honest with you—yes. Many times they have leveraged their own resale platform. Before they even went to the public, they were on StubHub. You know why they're sold out in 30 seconds? It's because StubHub already has the tickets and they're already jacked up in price.

"We have artists and promoters who come directly to StubHub to use us as a distribution channel. Those are not tickets being resold; those are tickets that are being sold for the first time where they are trying to capture the true market value of that ticket out the door."

It goes even further than that. When pressed further by the member for Windsor West, they had this to say: "It's unclear to us what the actual holdback numbers are, and I think this is another area that warrants significant study. The only study that we can point to right now that did look at ticket holdbacks comes from the state of New York. The New York attorney general commissioned a study, and it was published in February 2016. In their research, they cited that on average, only 46% ... ever make it to sale to the general public. For high-demand events, that average drops to 25%." For a higher-demand event, like somebody like Katy Perry, whom I know a lot of people know, "that dropped as low as 12% to 15%."

Mr. Speaker, it's right there in black and white. If you can't get tickets, one of the major reasons could easily be the fact that almost no tickets go on sale. If this government makes this information clear and they limit holdbacks significantly, they can release thousands of tickets into the marketplace almost immediately, like that.

In some cases, contracts have already been signed and would have to be honoured, but it would allow for the future of Ontario to be one where families could actually get tickets to events to take their kids and their grandkids to. We work hard. We deserve to be able to get tickets to events that we want to see.

The proof is right there in black and white, so I don't understand why the government backed off on this. I could see that even some of the Liberals were nodding their heads this morning that they think it's something that's not right.

Another issue that was flagged to us was the ability to request an actual hard copy of your ticket. I know some of the members—we've had issues with this. Just imagine a young kid going to see a Jays game on his birthday. He gets to the front and finds out that the ticket has already been checked in. If there was an actual hard copy of the ticket to sell, it could reduce counts of fraud. And that's happening. I hate to tell you, it happened to me once.

These two measures, along with stricter resale measures, limiting holdbacks and capping ticket resale prices, could make a real difference in the province of Ontario. It wouldn't just be for the residents, either. As many of you know, I represent the riding of Niagara Falls. We have world-class hotels down there, the best hospitality staff in the entire world and Niagara-on-the-Lake and Fort Erie. People come for the Falls, but they stay for the hospitality in my riding. One of the things that draws them is the concerts. They go to concerts; they go to stop by the Falls; they go to the casino. It's all part of the tourism. If we made tickets more available, we would have more people coming to Ontario.

As many of you know, we've been working hard to get an entertainment complex built in Niagara Falls. It was announced not that long ago that we're going to have a new 5,000-seat complex down there, which is great; we're extremely happy about that. But we still have lots of work to do. I'm working very hard to make sure the complex is built with local workers, local businesses and local engineers. We've had some success there, and we're thankful for that. If we use local skilled trades, we know it will be safe and we know it will last.

But part of making the entertainment complex a reality was proving we could bring people to Niagara Falls to use it. If we release thousands of tickets onto the market and make concerts accessible, we would be creating jobs in places like Niagara and Windsor, particularly border towns; Sarnia.

Mr. Speaker, let me conclude my few remarks. I hope I've made it clear that I'm happy to see legislation brought forward to address these issues, but there's more that can be done. While the debate is open now, let's take

the opportunity to seize the moment and make the changes that truly protect residents and protect consumers.

Lastly, I want to thank all of the tireless advocates and voices who reached out to us during the debate around Bill 166. Some of those stories were hard for them to tell. Their personal knowledge and their experience have been incredibly moving, and I can't thank them enough for the work that they've done.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you.

Hon. Michael Coteau: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Minister of Children and Youth Services on a point of order.

Hon. Michael Coteau: Mr. Speaker, I'm seeking unanimous consent for the Attorney General to be allowed to speak a second time on debate on the motion for third reading of Bill 166, An Act to amend or repeal various Acts and to enact three new Acts with respect to the construction of new homes and ticket sales for events.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Do we have unanimous consent? Carried.

Third reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): It being close to 10:15, this House stands recessed until 10:30 this morning.

The House recessed from 1010 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: It is my honour to introduce the following individuals who are visiting us today from the Ontario Principals' Council: Frank Palumbo, Ann Pace, Kelly Kempel, Bernadette Bruette, Peggy Sweeney and Rachel Gruber; and two principals I met with this morning, Nancy Brady from Ottawa-Carleton, and a special shout-out to Mark Campbell, who is a principal at Amherstburg Public School in a neighbouring riding to mine. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Michael Coteau: I just want to take a moment to wish Arianne Persaud a happy birthday. She is my legislative assistant, and of course, one of the best in the Legislature.

Ms. Soo Wong: I have a lot of guests here today. I want all of us to welcome them. From the Salvation Army, Mr. Glenn van Gulik; Major John Murray, territorial divisional secretary for public relations and development; Major Pat Phinney, Ontario Great Lakes division, divisional secretary for public relations and development; Major Everett Barrow, Ontario Great Lakes division, divisional commander; Lieutenant-Colonel Jennifer Groves, Ontario Great Lakes division, assistant divisional commander; Major Violet Barrow, Ontario Great Lakes division, divisional director of women's ministries; Major Bruce Shirran, Ontario Great Lakes division, executive director for the great New Life Centre, Sudbury; Mr. Bradley Harris, Ontario Central East division, executive director, Toronto housing and

homeless supports; Mr. Jeff Barrett, Ontario Central East, divisional secretary for business administration; and Major Karen Puddicombe, Ontario Great Lakes division, pastor, New Hope Community Church.

Welcome to Queen's Park. I hope all of you—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Welcome.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Please join me in welcoming, from the beautiful riding of Dufferin–Caledon, Cindy Abela, James Dawson, Tove Schmidt, Dwight Gross, and Ben Adams. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: First, I would like to welcome from our page captain Andrew Stevenson his grandparents Lynne and David Atkinson. Welcome to Queen's Park.

I also want to welcome leaders from the Tibetan community, all who have served on the board of the Tibetan Canadian Cultural Centre. We have, in the members' gallery, Kunsang Tanzin, Sonam Dorjee Chungpa, Lobsang Chozin, Gelek Gyaltong, Kalsang Dolkar, Tsering Tsomo, Tenzin Khedup, Karma Youngdue and Tenzin Tsochung. Tashidelek and welcome to Queen's Park.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Welcome.

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: I would like to extend a very warm welcome to Steph Crosier of the Kingston Whig-Standard from my riding of Kingston and the Islands. She's in the press gallery right now. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I know they have been introduced, but I would like to introduce them because they are constituents of mine: Dr. David and Lynne Atkinson, whose daughter taught me to drive a standard. I probably owe them a couple clutches that they don't know of. Welcome.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Welcome.

M^{me} Nathalie Des Rosiers: I would like to welcome representatives from the co-op movement. We have had a very pleasant co-op breakfast co-hosted by the all-party co-chairs, the MPP from Oxford and the MPP from Windsor–Tecumseh. I would like to welcome Michelle Vieira from Ag Energy Co-operative, director, sales and member relations, vice-chair of the Ontario Co-operative Association; David Cork, managing director, the Federation of Community Power Co-operatives; Janice Johnson, chair of the Ontario Co-operative Association and marketing manager of GROWMARK; Luc Morin, le directeur général du Conseil de la coopération de l'Ontario; Julien Geremie, directeur général adjoint du Conseil de la coopération de l'Ontario; Clément Panzavolta, business development officer du Conseil de la coopération de l'Ontario; Audrey Aczel, communications manager, Ontario Co-operative Association; and Peter Cameron, the acting executive director of the Ontario Co-operative Association. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Raymond Sung Joon Cho: I'm very happy to welcome, from Whitefield Christian Schools, teachers Ms. Dorcas Jew and Mr. Robin Cleland; and students Nathan Fraser, Badina Daniel, Joshua Sole, Krishan

Thanarajah, Aaliyah LaFleur, Max Wang, Wyvern Wang, Grace Yiu, Grace Vanden Heuvel, Amy Vilvarajan, and David Yacoub.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I'd like to welcome Mark Campbell, who is the principal of the Amherstburg Public School in my riding of Essex. Welcome, Mark.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: Today at Queen's Park, we will have a very special group that will be touring: 27 grade 10 students from West Hill Collegiate Institute, from my great riding of Scarborough–Guildwood. I look forward to meeting them and their teacher, Jane Sorel, at the grand staircase. Mr. Speaker, they have been visiting Queen's Park for the last four years.

WEARING OF PINS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of the Status of Women on a point of order.

Hon. Indira Naidoo-Harris: A point of order: I believe you will find that we have unanimous consent that members be permitted to wear rose pins today to recognize the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The minister is seeking unanimous consent to wear the rose pins in recognition of the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women. Do we agree? Agreed.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Before we begin question period, a reminder that there has been a warning carried over from this morning.

VISITORS

Mr. Arthur Potts: I want to introduce the great students from the Neil McNeil school, technically in Scarborough Southwest, but so many of these kids come from Beaches–East York.

N-E-I-L. Welcome to Queen's Park.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ENERGY POLICIES

Mr. Todd Smith: My question this morning is for the Acting Premier. It's about the Liberals' latest gas plant scandal.

The Ontario Energy Board warned the government in 2009—this was back in 2009—that ratepayers could be bilked out of millions, and the Liberals did nothing about it. They warned the Liberals again in 2011, and again, the Liberal government did nothing. Now we know that Goreway wasn't the only gas plant that decided to treat Ontario ratepayers like their own piggy bank. This government tried to hide that for years.

This looks like a smokescreen on the part of the government, and it happened under a succession of energy

ministers. Both the members from Scarborough Centre and Ottawa West–Nepean were Ministers of Energy during this misappropriation.

So, Mr. Speaker, how many Liberals does it take to cover up a \$100-million scandal?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member will withdraw.

Mr. Todd Smith: Withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Excuse me—without comment.

Deputy Premier?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: The Minister of Economic Development and Growth.

Hon. Brad Duguid: Handling another minister's file like this is kind of like being a grandparent, in some ways. I get to handle the file and work with you on this today, and then, after the weekend, I'll probably get to hand it back to the minister, when I've probably had enough of it. I'm pleased to be acting on behalf of the Minister of Energy today.

Again, let's put this all back into perspective. The IESO was made aware of some potential ineligible costs that had been going on within the system. They fully investigated those costs. They recovered the vast majority of those costs. They levied a \$10-million fine, the biggest ever levied in these kinds of circumstances. They posted the report and the record on the OEB website, so it's there for all to see. They've taken steps to ensure that the system has been strengthened so that it won't occur again.

I'll continue more about what some future actions are going to be, in the supplementary.

1040

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Todd Smith: The member opposite was the Minister of Energy when some of this gaming was going on, and his seatmate was also a Minister of Energy while this gaming was going on at Goreway.

This Goreway natural gas plant got the final draft of the report from the OEB in July. The government got the report in September. It was made public November 2, but amazingly, the Goreway executive who was helping write the new electricity market rules didn't resign until last Friday. That was after Cabinet Office received their advance copy of today's report by the Auditor General.

Speaker, if we pull the phone records for the energy ministry and Cabinet Office for the end of last week, would we find calls to Goreway power or the IESO pressuring them for a resignation?

Hon. Brad Duguid: This entire process is conducted, as it appropriately should be by the IESO, the Independent Electricity System Operator for Ontario. I say that because I think a lot of people don't know what the IESO is. Their job is to ensure that our electricity system is regulated—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I might get there quicker.

Carry on.

Hon. Brad Duguid: Mr. Speaker, their job is to ensure that the electricity system is properly regulated. They've done that; they're doing that job. They found some ineligible costs at a company, and, in fact, there were some other companies, as the member indicated, that have been here. They've taken action. They've cleaned up the system, strengthened the system to ensure it can't occur in the future, and they've recovered the vast majority of funds.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary?

Mr. Todd Smith: The member opposite can try and distance himself from this all he wants, but again, he was the Minister of Energy when this gaming was brought to light by the energy board, and so was his seatmate.

These Liberal scandals have a pattern: First, there's the mind-numbing incompetence, then there's the lack of oversight. We wonder who's minding the store over there when hundreds of millions of dollars are being wasted in this sector. Then there's the clumsy smokescreen that comes up.

Then, like a child called into the principal's office, the government ministers hang their heads and tell Ontarians how sorry they are, but because no one's ever held accountable over there by the Premier or anyone in that government, no one actually learns anything, so the same mistakes continue to occur over and over again. There are two former energy ministers in cabinet who both fell asleep at the switch. No one's minding the store.

To the Acting Premier: Why are those ministers still in cabinet?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please. Be seated, please.

Minister.

Hon. Brad Duguid: Speaker, I've been pretty forthright in my responses to the member on two consecutive questions, and the member persists in trying to get political with this, so perhaps I should respond in kind.

Let me remind that member that he's part of a party that better be very careful when they're making allegations of exploitation and gaming. When you look at their tabloid that they recently put out—talk about gaming people, claiming a 22%-income tax cut when it's nothing of the sort. That's just a bogus claim. You look further and you see \$12 billion in cuts, none of which are transparent, none of which are defined.

What kind of energy programs are they going to cut? What kind of education programs are they going to cut? What kind of health care programs? They're on pretty thin ice over there when they make those kinds of political allegations, if you ask me.

NORTHERN TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Good morning, Speaker. My question is for the Acting Premier. Citing non-existent

savings, this government callously cancelled passenger rail service to northeastern Ontario as part of a plan to sell off Ontario Northland. It was only after we called in the Auditor General, who revealed there were no savings to be had—in fact, it would actually cost taxpayers \$820 million to sell off Ontario Northland—that this government partially halted the sale.

Today, northerners are left without rail service while options in southern Ontario are expanded. Northerners were rightfully furious with the Liberal decision to cancel the service, fearing job losses and the end of a historic transportation option to and from Toronto for medical and other purposes.

Speaker, to the Acting Premier: Does she agree with the PC plan to bring back passenger rail service?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation.

Hon. David Zimmer: Thank you for that question—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): You will wait until I acknowledge, please.

Carry on.

Hon. David Zimmer: Thank you, Speaker.

People living in northern Ontario do have the right to rely on public transportation to travel between their communities. Especially in those remote communities, they rely on that transportation for essential access to essential services.

So what have we done? We are improving the inter-community bus services in northern Ontario, and that's why just this past Friday we announced that we would work with existing private carriers to continue improving the intercommunity bus services. What that has led to is that communities are going to benefit from that announcement. Those communities include Hearst, Horne-payne, White River, Red Lake, Emo, Rainy River, Fort Frances, Atikokan, Red Rock and other communities.

We are going to provide return service five days a week between all communities covered by the ONTC or private carriers, thanks to this new funding.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary? The member from Parry Sound—Muskoka.

Mr. Norm Miller: Back to the Acting Premier: While some northern Ontarians relied on the train, for remote northern communities, including many First Nations, air travel is the only reliable year-round mode of transportation. This government has shown they do not care about the needs of northerners in many ways, including when they increased the aviation fuel tax by 148%. As a direct result of this increase, northerners have seen the cost of everything from food to fuel to personal travel for medical appointments go up. Our Ontario PC leader has recognized this issue and committed to reversing the 148% increase to the aviation fuel tax for all northern airports, large and small.

Will the Deputy Premier admit that this increase has created unnecessary hardships for Ontarians living in remote northern communities, and will she agree to reverse this tax for northern Ontario?

Hon. David Zimmer: Minister of Finance.

Hon. Charles Sousa: As the member knows, aviation fuel tax was previously amended in 1992, and it was at 2.7 cents a litre. The majority of aviation fuel is the federal tax, and we have made it clear that the recent decrease in jet fuel prices, greater than four cents per litre—an increase in aviation fuel tax has been phased out between 2014 and 2017.

As we know, what we're trying to do is ensure that we provide support for those municipalities in regions of the north to ensure that they get more funding, which these members on the other side have consistently denied them. We have put forward increased funding for the OMPF and other support systems for the region.

The aviation fuel tax is meant to provide even greater revenues for the communities, and the member opposite knows that the majority of that is the federal government and our proportion of that amount is about one cent per litre.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary? The member from Sault Ste. Marie.

Mr. Ross Romano: To the Acting Premier: Investments in northern Ontario will not be confined simply to bringing back the Northlander or reversing the aviation fuel tax. It's about economic development as well. The Ring of Fire is the single greatest opportunity economically that northern Ontario has ever seen. It's estimated that it will create 5,500 sustainable jobs and increases of upwards of \$2 billion in government revenues. Under the People's Guarantee, Patrick Brown and a PC government will ensure that we are committed to building roads to the Ring of Fire. Since it was discovered, this government has done nothing but made broken promises and entered into bad faith negotiations with respect to the ring. After 10 years since its discovery, construction of the roads are still not under way. In fact, the Ring of Fire isn't even mentioned in the most recent fall economic statement.

Mr. Speaker, to the Acting Premier: Will this government finally admit that any reference they make to the Ring of Fire is nothing more than an election ploy?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Hon. Bill Mauro: The member opposite missed the announcement in August of this year. The Premier was in Thunder Bay with the Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation, the Minister of Northern Development and Mines and myself as we made the announcement, followed through on our commitment. First Nations were in attendance at the announcement at the same time, Speaker, and everybody is aware that they have signed on, moving forward not only with one road, an east-west, but also with a north-south from the Nakina/Aroland area straight north into Marten Falls. It's a very exciting announcement.

1050

Speaker, it still remains surprising to me that members of the Conservative Party will stand in this place and pretend as best as they are able that they will somehow provide more fiscal capacity for northern Ontario municipalities, when in fact they are the party, when in power, that downloaded massive amounts of financial

responsibility onto the backs of residential property taxpayers not only in northern Ontario, but in every one of the 444 municipalities across this province.

ENERGY POLICIES

Mr. John Vanthof: My question is to the Acting Premier. Yesterday, we learned that a private gas plant in Brampton gamed the Liberal government's system for managing private electric contracts to the tune of \$100 million. We know the company was fined \$10 million by the OEB for the fraud, and the Minister of Economic Development and Growth told reporters they had also paid back the full \$100 million. But the amount paid back by the private gas plant is blacked out in the Ontario Energy Board report.

Will the Acting Premier tell us when the people of Ontario will be able to see for themselves that this private gas plant company has paid them back in full?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: The Minister of Economic Development and Growth.

Hon. Brad Duguid: I'll share with the member some of the facts on this as they have come forward and some, actually, reported today. In all—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Excuse me. We're in warnings. Thank you.

Carry on.

Hon. Brad Duguid: In all, the IESO negotiated 92% of the costs coming back. That includes the \$10-million fine.

The challenge here is, some of these are disputed inappropriate costs that the company would take a different view on—as to whether they're inappropriate or not. So there was a—you could call it a negotiation between the IESO and the company to determine which of these costs were really deemed to be ineligible. The fact that 92% was recovered, in the eyes of the IESO, was deemed to be fair to the company but more so to ratepayers.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. John Vanthof: Again to the Acting Premier: If it's indeed true that the vast majority of these costs have been repaid by the company, can the Acting Premier tell us when people will see that on their hydro bills? When will they be paid back for this fraud?

Hon. Brad Duguid: The fact is that, yes, indeed, 92% of the costs are in the process of being paid back. I can't confirm that those dollars have flowed yet, but they will. My understanding is, they'd go right back into the IESO and the rate system, but you'd have to check with finance and our accountants to determine exactly how that cash flow happens.

I appreciate the question. Certainly, we may be able to determine a more in-depth answer for you in checking with the finance officials down the road.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary?

Mr. John Vanthof: Ontario families and businesses are struggling under the weight of soaring hydro bills. Rates have gone up by 300% under this Liberal government, and now we learn that in addition to paying for the hydro they use, families were forced to pay \$100 million to a private gas plant company for no reason at all.

I'll ask the Acting Premier again: How will she ensure that the people of Ontario who paid those hydro bills get their money back?

Hon. Brad Duguid: Again, Mr. Speaker, let's be very, very clear: \$100 million has not been lost; \$100 million, in fact, has been—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Excuse me. I'm not 100% sure, so I'll just wait.

Carry on.

Hon. Brad Duguid: In addition, the company that was accused of exploiting the process has been fined \$10 million. That money has flowed back into the system. Ratepayers are not going to be out. There is a dispute in terms of some of these costs; there's no question. I think that speaks to the system—the definition of what appropriate costs ought to have been.

The IESO has strengthened that system, as well, to ensure that this can't happen in the future.

It's an unfortunate circumstance. There's no defending the company, but at the end of the day, the IESO took the actions that it ought to have taken, and ratepayers have been compensated.

ENERGY POLICIES

Mr. John Vanthof: Once again to the Acting Premier. The OEB report on the newest gas plant scandal says that the team that monitors private electricity companies has been raising red flags about this kind of activity for years. It points out that the Liberal government's loopholes have allowed private companies to take money from Ontario families and businesses with very few consequences.

If the Liberal government knew about the \$100-million fraud and the loopholes and let the private gas plant get away with stealing money for so long, why didn't anyone do anything about it until now?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Minister of Economic Development and Growth.

Hon. Brad Duguid: The IESO is the organization that administers these matters and deals with these matters. It's not the minister or the government that engages in these kinds of discussions and negotiations with these companies, nor do we do the procurement; it's the IESO that does that.

They identified that there was an issue going on. They investigated the issue. The issue did take some time. It was apparently very complex and difficult to determine. At the end of the day, they determined that there were some ineligible costs that were claimed by this company and a few others. They took the action to recover the vast majority of the funds that had been deemed to be ineligible claims, and they fined this company \$10 million in

addition to that. So, Mr. Speaker, I believe they've taken the action they ought to have taken, and certainly at the surface it seems like it's a pretty fair result.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. John Vanthof: This is a long-standing issue. The Brampton gas plant alone was able to defraud the people of this province for almost three years before it was discovered. The OEB report says: "The systems that are in place ... have created opportunities for exploitation, to the serious financial disadvantage of Ontario ratepayers."

Why has this Liberal government allowed private energy companies to exploit the people of Ontario for so long?

Hon. Brad Duguid: Once again, let me repeat: The IESO has recovered the vast majority of the funds that were in dispute and, indeed, levied a fine to the company in question. So ratepayers are not out here for the vast majority of those ineligible funds. That's, I think, point number one.

Point number two: When something like this occurs, it does mean that there must have been some kind of a problem or a flaw with the system that was in place. In this case, it would appear that the definition of "eligible costs" was probably not clear enough, and the IESO has taken measures to correct that, which is the appropriate course of action for them to take.

The dollars have been recovered, the IESO has taken appropriate action to ensure this doesn't happen in the future and, indeed, a market renewable system is being put into place where this will never, ever happen in the future.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. John Vanthof: This is not an isolated incident. There is a systemic issue with how this government allows private energy companies to operate in Ontario. The government knew about this fraud, and they did nothing for years.

The OEB report went on to say, "The panel has frequently commented on the substantial inefficiencies and opportunities for exploitation that are associated with different elements of the design of the wholesale electricity market." You knew about it, and you did nothing.

I'll ask the Acting Premier again: Why has her government allowed the people of Ontario to foot the bill for the shenanigans of private energy companies for so long?

Hon. Brad Duguid: I have to correct the member again. The funds that are in question have, for the most part, been recovered. When he says "foot the bill," indeed the IESO has recovered the vast majority of the funds and levied a \$10-million fine to the company.

There is no defending a company that exploited this system. At the same time, we need to ensure—and the IESO is very aware of this—that they need to be more vigilant in their systems when they put those systems in place, to ensure that there is clarity in what eligible costs ought to be or ought not to be.

They've made the changes they need to make to that system. I think that's what Ontario ratepayers would

expect of them. They've recovered the vast majority of funds on behalf of Ontario ratepayers. I think Ontario ratepayers would expect that as well. And they've levied a \$10-million fine, the largest ever, on that company. I think Ontario ratepayers would expect that as well.

1100

MINIMUM WAGE

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: To the Deputy Premier: The Russian Olympic team were not the only folks to receive a ban yesterday. Last night, CTV London reported that the Port Albert General Store is closing this winter for the first time in 150 years, a direct result of this government's bad policies. Six employees will be out of work this winter just before Christmas.

When it reopens this spring, Speaker, the Deputy Premier, a summer client, will no longer be welcome there. Can the Deputy Premier explain to the House why she has been banned from the Port Albert General Store and tell us how many other Liberal caucus members have been banned from small businesses throughout the province because of their bad decisions?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Deputy Premier.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: To the Minister of Labour.

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Perhaps the member opposite can explain: When you had the chance to stand up for working people—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): To the Chair, please.

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: —in the province of Ontario, you turned your backs on—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated. The member from Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington is warned. And I'll wait for the others, if you'd like to add?

To the Chair, please.

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Speaker, a third of people in the province of Ontario currently make less than \$15 an hour. Half of those people—more than half of those people, Speaker—are between the ages of 25 and 64. That's the time when they're trying to raise families, pay rent, buy clothes for the kids, put the kids through school, put food on the table. This party opposite has denied these families the opportunity to do that, and now they pull out a gimmicky question like this?

Speaker, we all had an opportunity to stand up for working people in Ontario. These guys turned their backs on them.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: You guys are joining the Trump team.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Infrastructure is warned.

Supplementary?

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Again, back to the Deputy Premier: This party, this government, just doesn't get it. These six people will be earning zero dollars per hour because they're losing their income through the winter months, because this owner has no other options but to close.

Speaker, I am sure this is just one example of many more to come.

In the People's Guarantee, we will still move forward with minimum wage increases, just more slowly. This is an approach that the Ontario Chamber of Commerce said would mitigate job impacts by 74%. Will the Deputy Premier sign on to the People's Guarantee, help us fix the mess that her government has made and save jobs and small businesses throughout Ontario?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please. Be seated, please. Thank you.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex is warned. You all want to get the last word; I do.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): A little louder, and I'll warn you.

Minister?

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Quite the contrary to what the member is asserting, when the opportunity was given to this House to support working people—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Huron–Bruce is warned.

Carry on.

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Thank you, Speaker—to support working people in the province of Ontario, these guys refused to stand up and be counted. The Ontario economy is leading the G7 in economic growth. We've got unemployment numbers so low, that we haven't seen in decades. The Ontario economy is doing well, and when this party had an opportunity to vote, just last week, they voted against paid sick days for Ontario workers, they voted against child death leave, crime-related leave, disappearance leave, pregnancy leave and domestic violence and sexual violence leave. These folks had an opportunity to stand up for working people in the province of Ontario—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Nepean–Carleton is warned. I'll do this all morning if you like.

Carry on.

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Then, they put out the glossy magazine that tells us they've lost \$12 billion in costs. They don't know what to do to it. Then, they tell us they're going to roll back the minimum wage—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Be seated, please.

New question.

GOVERNMENT ADVERTISING

Mr. Wayne Gates: My question is to the Acting Premier. Yesterday, the publicly owned Niagara-on-the-Lake Hydro issued a simple and straightforward request: Keep your political messages off our residents' bills. Nobody likes to receive a bill, but right now the Ontario Energy Board forces local distributors to print Liberal messages on their bills. They're forcing utilities to include lines that refer to savings from their hydro scheme, savings that aren't actually there. The so-called savings this government is forcing them to print is nothing more than costs they've kicked down the road, a plan which won't lower bills and won't bring hydro back into public hands.

My question is simple, Mr. Speaker. Local distributors are asking the Liberals to stop forcing them to produce bills that contain their political advertising for a plan they don't believe is actually creating savings. Will the Acting Premier listen to local distributors?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: To the Minister of Economic Development and Growth

Hon. Brad Duguid: I think the only people in this province who don't want ratepayers to know they're getting a 25% cut on their energy rates are the NDP, and maybe the PCs. I understand why the member would be upset that ratepayers are being informed that their bills are going down by 25%.

This government doesn't design the energy bills. In fact, we've heard—and I'm sitting beside a previous energy minister—time and time again from ratepayers that they want to see ways to ensure that the bills are easier for ratepayers to understand. That's what the OEB is looking at on behalf of ratepayers. I think they're doing some good work in that respect.

But I do understand why the member wouldn't want them to be aware of their 25% cut to their energy rates.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Wayne Gates: Again to the Acting Premier: Let me quote Jim Ryan, the chair of the publicly owned Niagara-on-the-Lake Hydro utility. He said, "Putting political messages on the invoice is simply wrong," and frankly, we agree with him. Keep your political spin off people's hydro bills.

In answer to his response, residents are smart enough to know that if their bills have gone up 300%, they aren't seeing savings no matter how many times you write it on their bill. Will the Acting Premier stop insulting people whose bills have skyrocketed because of bad decisions and remove the political messaging from the peoples' hydro bills as requested by local distributors?

Hon. Brad Duguid: There are no political messages on the bills at all. Informing ratepayers that they're getting 25% off their energy costs is information—information that they deserve to have in spite of the efforts of the NDP to ensure that they don't know that they're getting 25% off.

Why would the member not want his constituents to know that their energy rates have gone down by 25%?

The only reason I can think of is a political reason on their part, that they don't want their members to know that we've brought energy rates down in the province of Ontario by 25%. We're very proud of that.

At the same time, he ought to let his constituents know that we've also built a clean, reliable and affordable energy system in the province of Ontario. It hasn't been easy. It's taken a lot of investment. It's taken a lot of time, but Ontarians have a clean, reliable, affordable energy system that they can be proud of.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: My question is for the Minister of the Status of Women. Today is a day of national remembrance and action on violence against women. It is an emotional day for women and Canadians across the country, who remember with great sadness the events of December 6, 1989.

1110

We will hold an annual commemorative event in my riding of Kingston and the Islands at Sydenham Street United Church, organized by Leigh Martins; I thank her for her efforts.

On December 6, 1989, 14 young women were murdered at l'École Polytechnique in Montreal. They were young women—engineers—and their lives were cut short by a senseless act of misogyny by a man who said he wanted to kill feminists.

Minister, can you tell me what this province is doing to challenge, every day, the deeply rooted attitudes that lead to violence against women?

Hon. Indira Naidoo-Harris: I'd like to thank the member from Kingston and the Islands for this very important question.

Speaker, 28 years have passed, but we will never forget what happened to those 14 young women, and to the women and girls who have suffered violence in this province.

As the Minister of the Status of Women, it is my priority to ensure that women and girls feel safe in this province, and to help build a society where women can live free from the fear or threat of violence.

But the harsh reality is that 83% of domestic violence victims are women. The reality is that women are four times more likely to be victims of homicide. The reality is that one in three women will experience some form of sexual violence or harassment in their lives.

That is why we are working tirelessly to improve the province's response to domestic violence and to create a gender-based violence strategy. Our strategy will integrate the sexual violence and harassment action plan, the plan to end violence against indigenous women, and our human trafficking initiatives, and will update the Domestic Violence Action Plan.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: I would like to thank the minister for her answer.

The statistics are truly alarming. My colleague is right: We need to take action to change attitudes and perspectives on gender violence, because this affects us all.

Hashtags like #MeToo have shone a light on how prevalent sexual violence and harassment are in our homes, our workplaces and our communities. Women are showing enormous courage and strength by speaking out, and we need to make sure they know that we are listening.

Gender-based violence impacts not only survivors but their families, their workplaces, their communities and their relationships—forever.

Mr. Speaker, can the minister please outline specific new policies that address the needs of survivors of violence, and their families, in our communities across this province?

Hon. Indira Naidoo-Harris: Thanks to the member from Kingston and the Islands.

Speaker, I'm pleased to speak about the cross-government supports we are providing to Ontario women. Here is what we're doing.

Working with the Ministry of Labour, we will be providing paid leave for survivors of domestic and sexual violence. This means that a survivor can keep their job and escape a violent and abusive relationship, to seek support and safety for themselves and their families.

With the Ministry of Housing, we are helping survivors of domestic violence and human trafficking to escape violent situations by providing faster access to housing through our portable housing benefit. These survivors will receive priority access to income-based social housing.

I'm also pleased to report that front-line workers in the hospitality, health, education and community services sectors are now able to access training to help them recognize and respond to sexual violence and harassment on the job. It's part of It's Your Shift.

We're working hard to build a future free from the threat or fear of violence for women.

HIGHWAY SAFETY

Mr. Steve Clark: My question is for the Minister of Transportation. Last week saw another tragic crash on Highway 401 in my riding, which left two people dead and four injured. Mayors in Leeds-Grenville took their concerns about highway safety to the minister way back in March, after a horrific fatal collision involving a hazardous chemical. They demanded action to make the highway safer and protect motorists and first responders, and the minister ignored them for six months.

Here's how Prescott mayor Brett Todd described the ministry's response: "We waited six months to get that first meeting. We lost a great deal of time there."

Speaker, the minister is meeting with these frustrated mayors on December 15. Having wasted so much time spinning his wheels, what measures will he announce to end the carnage on our highways?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I want to thank the member for his question. Of course, I have said many times in this

chamber that whenever we have any injury—in particular, any fatality—on a highway anywhere in the province, it is something that the ministry obviously takes very seriously. Our condolences go out to the families of the loved ones who are involved.

I have had the opportunity—and the member from Leeds-Grenville would know this. He and I have actually specifically chatted. He has come to see me about this particular challenge that municipal leaders and the travelling public in eastern Ontario are facing.

The member did neglect to mention that I've already had one in-person meeting in Kingston with his mayor and a collection of other mayors from eastern Ontario. It took place a number of weeks ago. I found it to be a very productive meeting. I heard a variety of opinions and input provided by the mayors from eastern Ontario. I think they felt that that first meeting that took place weeks ago was a worthwhile meeting and set a very solid foundation for how we intend to move forward.

As I committed to at that meeting that took place weeks ago, I expect we'll have an update in the next number of days to provide to the—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Steve Clark: Back to the minister: I want to remind the minister that the mayors aren't coming to the table just to hear him talk. The only commitment this minister has made is that widening the increasingly congested highway to the six lanes we need isn't happening. Despite the dangerous conditions, he says that eastern Ontario can wait. Let me tell the minister: That's unacceptable, and we need to hear real solutions.

Since May, there have been 16 people killed and 18 people injured in a dozen crashes on the 401 between Trenton and Cornwall. The snow is flying and the busy holiday travel season is upon us. Again, my question: Why did the minister waste so much time, and what measures is he going to announce to make eastern Ontario highways safer and to save lives?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: As I said in the first answer to this member, we at the ministry and I, specifically, take this area of responsibility extremely seriously. I have said on many occasions the safety of our roads and highways, from my perspective, is not meant to be nor should it ever be a partisan issue.

I have to say, despite my best efforts to convey that message not only to that member, to his leader, to their team but also to our municipal partners, it is borderline shameful that this member would stand and try to take some sort of partisan jab over an issue that is extremely important to me, to the ministry, to the travelling public and ultimately to his—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Niagara West-Glanbrook is warned.

Carry on.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: As I was saying, as members in this House know, for the last 16 consecutive years, the province of Ontario has ranked first or second across North America for road and highway safety. It will be my

pleasure to continue to work with Mayor Todd, the rest of the eastern region mayors, the OPP and the ministry to make sure that we get this right.

GROUP HOMES

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: To the Acting Premier: Yesterday, I rose in this House to talk about a man named Esa who died trying to escape the horrific conditions in an unlicensed group home. Esa paid the landlord almost \$4,000 for one month in that mouse-infested basement, where he frequently was locked inside.

Sadly, Esa's situation is not unique. "You could see the cockroaches swarming, almost a moving carpet," one man said of his time in an illegal home. Countless other residents have reported unsanitary linens, overcrowding and going for days without food.

My colleague from Welland introduced Bill 135 in May, which would establish a framework for the licensing of these homes. If the government is not willing to create more spaces in long-term care and affordable, accessible housing, then the very least they could do is establish a framework for licensing.

Is this Liberal government willing to make the commitment today, pass Bill 135 and license and regulate these group homes?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: To the Minister of Health.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I'm happy to speak to this important question. I share the concern that's raised by the member opposite that these stories from individuals who rely on these environments—care homes, group homes—to provide the necessary supports, to provide an environment which is conducive to their getting well and staying well—these reports are definitely troubling.

1120

I think the member understands that there are a variety of individuals who may avail themselves of these types of residences, so this is necessarily an effort that requires work across ministries. I've asked my ministry to take the lead to look at the situation in care homes and group homes, particularly those where we find vulnerable individuals, and to interact with stakeholders, clients and residents themselves to find out what more can be done.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Back to the Acting Premier. We finally know who is responsible for this issue: the Minister of Health, who yesterday said that it was a "cross-ministry issue," meaning that the people who have lived and died in these horrendous conditions should look to all the ministries that have failed them.

The Ministry of Health has failed to ensure there are enough long-term-care beds, mental health supports and housing for people leaving hospitals.

The Ministry of Community and Social Services has failed people with developmental disabilities who face a decade-long wait-list for housing.

The Ministry of Seniors Affairs has failed to address dire issues of seniors living in poverty.

The Ministry of Housing and the Poverty Reduction Strategy has failed to provide support to municipalities to crack down on these unlicensed homes with numerous safety violations.

Saying that this is a complex, multi-ministerial issue does not excuse this Liberal government for ignoring this problem for years. Will we get a commitment for immediate action today so that nobody else has to live or die in these horrendous conditions?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Minister.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: The member opposite surely knows that municipalities have oversight. They have the regulatory ability to pass bylaws, and many, if not most of them, do.

I know that she's heckling right now. This is a very serious issue, and we're taking it seriously, Mr. Speaker. There is no government before this government that has stood up for and created stronger regulatory environments for long-term-care homes. We've strengthened oversight and responsibility for child care, for daycare and for retirement homes. All of those were completely unlicensed and unregulated under an NDP government. We have provided the strongest regulatory environment for these facilities in the history of Ontario.

I have committed to have my ministry take the lead to look at group homes and care homes, which contain a variety of individuals under municipal oversight. We'll look at it with stakeholders and with residents to see what might be done.

LANDLORDS

Mr. Jack MacLaren: My question is to the Minister of Housing. Eli Saghbini is a landlord who is suffering the unfairness of the Landlord and Tenant Board and the rules which heavily favour the tenant. Eli had a tenant who did not pay the rent on August 1. He filed the Landlord and Tenant Board N4 form on August 2, the Landlord and Tenant Board L1 form on August 16, went to a Landlord and Tenant Board hearing on September 18, got an eviction notice for September 30, and called the sheriff on October 2 to post an eviction notice on the tenant's door to leave by October 12.

The tenant left. Two and a half months had passed, and Eli is out of pocket \$4,000 plus costs. This isn't fair. Minister, can you help Eli by restoring fairness for him and all landlords?

Hon. Peter Z. Milczyn: I want to thank the member for Carleton–Mississippi Mills for the question. I want to express empathy toward Eli Saghbini and to reassure that we understand their concerns and that there are protections in place for situations like these.

Small landlords have a critical role to play in providing housing throughout the province. We know that the vast majority of landlords are fair, reasonable and hard-working.

The RTA, which came into effect in January 2007, lays out the legal framework for governing landlord-tenant relationships in Ontario. It also created the Landlord and Tenant Board. We're proud that the Landlord and Tenant Board is able to answer approximately half a million calls per year from tenants and landlords and process about 80,000 applications per year.

Tenants and landlords may apply to the LTB as well as go to Small Claims Court to resolve disputes. We're committed to supporting this co-operative system that helps both landlords and tenants, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jack MacLaren: To the Minister of Housing again: Eli Saghbini is a small businessman who is struggling to cope with the landlord-tenant rules that are not fair to landlords. Eli offers the following suggestions for changes: (1) create a problem tenant directory; (2) allow landlords to collect a damage deposit; (3) shorten the time for the N4 form notice of application from two weeks to one day; (4) shorten the time for the L1 form application to the hearing from four weeks to one week; and (5) reduce the landlord application fee from \$190 to \$50, the same as the tenant.

These changes would create fairness for landlords and tenants. Minister, will you make these changes?

Hon. Peter Z. Milczyn: I want to assure the House that we're committed to ensuring that landlords and tenants are always protected under the law. This government also knows that small business people have so much to offer this province, and we understand the pressures that are sometimes put on them.

Mr. Speaker, I note the member has listed a number of suggestions that he has, but I want to remind the House that before a tenancy starts under the Residential Tenancies Act, it allows landlords to do the due diligence, to do credit checks, to check on past rental history, references and guarantees, and to comply with the Ontario Human Rights Code when they ask these questions. Landlords have the opportunity to do this due diligence. We maintain that by doing this, landlords can protect themselves.

It provides for a fast-tracked eviction process. It allows landlords to evict when deliberate damage is done to a unit and it protects other—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

New question.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: My question is to the Minister of Economic Development and Growth. There's a lot going on with the global economy, and a lot of uncertainty. It appears that here, we can be confident that Ontario's economy is headed in the right direction.

Parents in my community want to know that their kids are going to have access to employment, workers want to know that their jobs are safe for the foreseeable future, and business owners want to know that Ontario is a good place to invest and grow business. I want to assure the people and families in my riding of Barrie of just how

strong our economy is today. Can the minister please provide an update on Ontario's economic progress in light of this month's jobs numbers?

Hon. Brad Duguid: I'm delighted to inform the member that this past month, we've seen a record amount of job growth in Ontario. We're up 43,500 net new jobs in the province of Ontario. That is the largest increase since February 2008, before the global recession.

We also passed another milestone last Friday. We have now created over 800,000 net new jobs since the global recession. More accurately, that's 843,200 net new jobs. We continue to lead the G7 in growth. Our unemployment rate also hit a new low at 5.5%. That's the lowest unemployment rate we've seen in 17.5 years in the province of Ontario.

Mr. Speaker, there's every reason to be confident that Ontario's economy is doing well today and we're headed in the right direction.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: Thank you to the minister for that answer. This is great news to the families all across Ontario.

There is no question that our investments in people and infrastructure and our business growth initiatives are paying off for the people of this province. There's no question that this economy is doing extremely well. This is shown again by the fantastic job numbers this month—43,500 net new jobs in one month is remarkable—along with the lowest unemployment rate in 17 and a half years at 5.5%.

In fact last year, in my riding of Barrie, unemployment was the highest in the province at 7.9%. Now it is at 3.4%, the lowest in the province and second-lowest in the country. That translates to over 17,000 jobs in my home town of Barrie in the last year alone.

However, there are uncertainties today in the global economy, whether it's NAFTA, Brexit or emerging technology. Can the minister outline to this House what risks exist for our economy going into the future?

1130

Hon. Brad Duguid: Mr. Speaker, Ontario is in a position of strength. Being in a position of strength means that if we stay the course, we can withstand any risks that emerge in the changing global economy, be they risks from NAFTA or emerging technologies or any other types of global change.

We've also stepped up when it comes to the new economy. We want to ensure that we're at the cutting edge of technological development. I would say that Ontario is not only a leader in economic growth for today's economy, but we're going to be a leader in economic growth for many decades ahead. That means we will be able to pass on to our next generation an economy that we can be proud to pass on to them, that comes with the opportunities many of us have had in the past—maybe even greater opportunities. That would not be happening without the investments we've made in our people, our talent, innovation, infrastructure—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

GROUP HOMES

Ms. Laurie Scott: To the Minister of Children and Youth Services: 10 months ago a group home in Oakwood, in my riding, burned to the ground killing two people, including one child. This sad incident highlighted many flaws in our province's management of group homes.

This past week we saw a disturbing article in the Toronto Star about the abuse and violence faced by group home staff, as well as the lack of training and oversight by the ministry.

As a member of the government's panel reviewing the residential care system put it, "You know your system is based on the flimsiest of foundations when you have absolutely no standards on who can do this work."

The Ontario Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth had previously said he is fed up with the situation, but we have seen little action from this government.

Why is the government allowing our children and care workers to live in such terrible conditions?

Hon. Michael Coteau: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member opposite for the question.

The events that took place in her riding were very tragic. My heart goes out to everyone involved: the workers, the family, the community as a whole.

The experiences shared by the group home workers with the Toronto Star—I know it was a very difficult article for many to read. I wanted to take a moment just to acknowledge the bravery of the folks sharing the stories that were captured in that article.

Service providers and workers play an important role in the lives of young people in care, and they have a strong influence on the day-to-day lives of young people who are in their care.

Immediately following the fire, multiple investigations were started by local and provincial authorities, some of which are continuing. The ministry continues to offer its full support and co-operation in those investigations.

The places that children and youth live must be welcoming and must meet their needs.

We're doing work reform to ensure we better position young people for success.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Mr. Speaker, the government needs to start treating our group home workers and high-needs children like people, not statistics.

I had written to the minister about the tragic state of our group homes this past April. I even filed an order paper question to see if I could get some real answers from this government. Unfortunately, the Toronto Star article shows that this government just isn't listening.

First, they failed to implement key recommendations from the Residential Services Review Panel to create a single oversight body for the system, even though they could have included that in Bill 89. Now we learn that

even when my local children's aid society tried to reach out to the ministry to address an increase in violence, "there was silence."

Will the minister stop ignoring these calls for action and take this issue with the seriousness that it deserves?

Hon. Michael Coteau: Mr. Speaker, we've taken immediate action to address some of the issues the member is raising. We've increased the number of unannounced inspections of licensed residences. We've confirmed that licensed residences are compliant with the current fire code, and we've established an intensive site review team to conduct enhanced inspections of the sites.

Mr. Speaker, the interesting thing about this question—and I don't want to make this question a contentious back and forth. We put forward a whole new framework for residential services for young people, and we've put forward a blueprint. In Bill 89, we've modernized many of the aspects that we're talking about today, and still, we don't know why the Conservative Party voted against Bill 89, which modernized services for children in this province. I still have to ask, why didn't we have co-operation from the Conservative Party—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Stop the clock.

Teachable moment: Exactly why you're supposed to speak to the Chair: When I stand, if you're speaking to the Chair, you'll know I was standing. And I also—

Mr. John Yakabuski: These should count as warnings.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Would you like me to interject? Also, the interjections were not helpful either.

New question?

LIQUOR LICENSING

Mr. Percy Hatfield: My question is to the Deputy Premier. Good morning. Seven months ago, I had a private member's bill pass second reading. It called for a change in the law to allow Canadian Club whisky to be sold where it has been made in Windsor for the past 130 years.

Speaker, you may recall that the owners of Hiram Walker sold the Canadian Club brand, but it's still made, under contract, by the same people in the same place. Red tape and the current regulations don't allow whisky bottled under contract to be sold where it's produced. I've been told that Liberal senior policy advisers claim changing the law might impact international trade policies.

Could someone over there point me to the exact language or clause in some agreement that states this simple change is just too much work for Liberals to undertake?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: To the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Charles Sousa: I appreciate the question from the member opposite who has been advocating strongly

for his community to maintain the Canadian Club heritage centre open, recognizing how important it is for tourism and his community. I applaud you for the tremendous work you're doing. He also recognized that the private member's bill is before the committee and that there are some elements of the bill that would cause precedents in respect to selling liquor and alcohol outside of an LCBO store.

Recognizing that, we have tried to accommodate the new owners of Canadian Club, who have yet to state that they will in fact maintain it open even after we put forward this issue. I can talk more about this in the supplementary.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: The Canadian Club heritage brand centre, as the minister has referenced, is a palatial building, one of the most significant in Ontario if not North America. Some 15,000 people used to tour the building every year. It's Windsor's second-most-visited and most-popular tourist attraction after Caesars. It has been closed since March, since this issue erupted.

Why won't the Liberals pull out all the stops, put on their thinking caps and find a solution so that a few bottles of whisky can be sold after a tour and the doors to the brand centre can reopen to the public?

Hon. Charles Sousa: As the member also knows, we do offer some of those privileges when it's being produced within those locations. That's not the case here. The member opposite, I know, doesn't want unintended consequences in regard to social responsibility and other measures.

Again, the owners of the heritage centre haven't yet even requested this. I know the member wants it, and so do I, but the owners have not stood up and the owners are not guaranteeing that they'll maintain it open even after we put this forward. The precedent it would set would be precarious right across the province. I know the member doesn't want that. But I do feel for his need, and I would like to see a solution in that respect too.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Arthur Potts: My question is to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Providing Ontarians with timely access to the care they need, whether at home, in the community or in one of our many institutions or our outstanding hospitals is of the utmost importance to our government. Over the past 14 years, our health system has improved significantly. We've increased our investment in health care each and every year, allowing us to treat more patients, provide better care and reduce wait times to some of the shortest in the country. Our government has increased funding for health care by \$23 billion since 2003 and, in our most recent budget, we announced an additional \$9 billion to support hospital construction projects across the province.

Today, across Ontario, there are 34 major hospital projects under way that will provide additional capacity and state-of-the-art facilities for people across the prov-

ince, including planning for a major rebuild of Michael Garron Hospital in my riding of Beaches–East York.

Will the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care please inform the House of the great news he shared with surgeons at Toronto Western Hospital?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: In the last few days, we've had two great hospital-related announcements. On Friday, I had the honour of being in Windsor—in fact, I have to give a shout-out to the three Windsor and Essex MPPs, because we announced a brand-new, multi-billion-dollar state-of-the-art hospital for Windsor and Essex that's going to be providing the absolute highest quality of care to the residents of both Windsor county and Essex county.

Yesterday, I was at Toronto Western Hospital here in Toronto with the member from Trinity–Spadina to announce an investment in the order of \$100 million to completely renew, renovate and expand the operating theatres, the surgical suites, at Toronto Western Hospital, a hospital that we all know is so well known for their advanced care, training and capacity in areas like neurosurgery and many other surgical specialities.

A big shout-out to the people of Toronto Western—an important investment that will enable those doctors, surgeons and their teams to do even better.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The time for question period is over.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Education on a point of order.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: It is my pleasure today to welcome some very special guests to Queen's Park: the Ontario Principals' Council president, Mary Linton, as well as Allyson Otten, the executive director. Please welcome them as they visit with us today.

ANNUAL REPORT, AUDITOR GENERAL

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I beg to inform the House that the following document was tabled: 2017 annual report from the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario.

There are no deferred votes. This House stands recessed until 3 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1142 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I have an introduction of guests. With us in the Speaker's gallery is a very special group, special visitors from the wonderful country of Cuba: Mr. Marcelino Medina González, the first deputy minister of foreign affairs of Cuba; His Excellency Julio Garmendia Peña, the ambassador of Cuba to Canada; Mrs. Johana Tablada, the deputy director of the foreign ministry of Cuba; and Tania López Larroque, the consul general of Cuba in Toronto. We've

got them all here. We want to thank them all for being here and welcome them to Canada. Thank you very much for being here.

I can't tell you what we agreed upon, but it's really juicy.

FINANCIAL STATEMENTS, AUDITOR GENERAL

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I beg to inform the House that the following document was tabled: the financial statements for the year ending March 31, 2017, from the Office of the Auditor General.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

NORTHERN ONTARIO

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Thank you, and good afternoon, Speaker. As a former mayor of the city of North Bay, it was clear to me that decisions made here at Queen's Park aren't always in the best interests of northerners and aren't made with a northern perspective being considered in the process.

Northern interests are commonly ignored in favour of others, or at least they have been by this government. I've spoken many times on this and given many examples of how this has been the case, from the Far North Act to the cancellation of the Northlander to the Ring of Fire. The government should do more to institutionalize the impact on northern Ontario by decisions made at Queen's Park.

That's why I'm thrilled that this is clearly recognized in the PC Party's People's Guarantee. It states, "Patrick Brown and the Ontario PCs will ensure that the voice of northern Ontario is brought to every decision made here at Queen's Park by requiring every cabinet submission to include a northern Ontario assessment." I like to call it shining a northern lens on all issues debated here at Queen's Park.

Speaker, this is real change that works for Ontario, and it's real change that will work for the north.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Today marks the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women. On December 6, 1989, 14 women were killed at École Polytechnique in Montreal. The shooter separated the women from the men, calling them "Feminists to slaughter." They were murdered for being women. They were students who were going against the grain and pursuing goals in a field that wasn't typical for women. They were paving the way, and their stories got stopped violently.

I hope the girls in today's classrooms understand their value and believe they can take on the world and make it better.

But our children are growing up with violence. Our children grow up surrounded by degrading and gender-

based violent media and see violence at home, in schools and in the community. We should worry that they might think that violence is normal or inevitable. Common cases of sexual violence in social systems have encouraged women to start movements using the hashtags #BeenRapedNeverReported, #NOTokay and #MeToo.

Women should not expect to be assaulted on our campuses, to be harassed in the workplace or to be exploited and trafficked. Our indigenous sisters should not expect to die and disappear. Girls should not grow up expecting to be objectified and minimized or assaulted. Women should report and expect to be believed. Our Muslim sisters should not have to fear for their safety. No woman should be in danger for making decisions about her clothing, future, family or her body.

In the global context of power, fear, hate, male dominance and government-sanctioned misogyny, women and girls are vulnerable.

On December 6, we mourn, but each day we must unite to ensure that women and girls can become what they deserve, dare and dream to be.

CO-OPERATIVE MOVEMENT

MOUVEMENT COOPÉRATIF

M^{me} Nathalie Des Rosiers: Co-operatives build a better world.

Les coopératives sont des instruments de développement économique qui permettent aux plus faibles de s'unir pour vendre, produire, créer, et généralement contribuer à la société.

There are more than 1,300 co-op businesses in Ontario that contribute \$6 billion annually and employ 50,000 full-time employees. It's also a movement of over 49,000 volunteers. Co-operatives operate in a variety of sectors, from financial to housing, agriculture, child care, brewing, energy, arts, media and funeral homes, to name just a few.

Le secteur coopératif a une importance particulière pour les francophones : c'est ce qui a permis à la minorité de continuer à s'unir et à se développer.

The co-op movement was founded a long time ago, but it continues to contribute to all of Ontario. Since I was born in a small apartment on top of a caisse populaire, the co-op movement is very close to my heart. Later, I will be tabling a private member's bill to continue to support the expansion of the co-op movement in Ontario and to level the playing field to ensure that every co-op can fulfill its members' dreams, ambitions and aspirations.

Célébrons le mouvement coopératif de l'Ontario et souhaitons-lui longue vie.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I would like to join my colleague from Oshawa with sentiments about today, December 6. It is a sombre day for girls, women and entire families as we remember the tragedy of the

Montreal massacre at École Polytechnique. On this day in 1989, 14 young women were gunned down, the only reason being that they were women. Each of these 14 young girls were engineering students. They were sisters, cousins, teammates and daughters. They all had brilliant minds ready to flourish.

I'm proud to say that today in Huron-Bruce, citizens gathered in Port Elgin to participate in a vigil organized by the Southport Canadian Federation of University Women. This local event has taken place every year for the past 26 years, and it is just one of the many vigils happening across the province today, and across Canada.

I want to take this opportunity to recognize every single girl and woman who has faced or continues to face gender violence every day. I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge the thousands of missing and murdered indigenous women across Ontario and Canada, all of the victims of family violence, and all of those who have been forever changed by sexual violence.

I believe in the value of empowering young women to accomplish anything they can set their minds to, and I ask you all to reflect and stand with me and together say that violence against women will not be tolerated. Today and, most importantly, every day, we must talk about how we are going to continue to move forward and create a world where all genders can confidently thrive.

ENERGY POLICIES

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Since this is my last statement before the holidays, I'd like to talk about the spirit of giving today, because that's what the holidays are all about.

This holiday season, Ontarians will be thinking about what the Wynne Liberals have given to them this year. They'll be thinking about the 300% hike to their hydro bills and the \$4.5-million salary the Liberals gave the CEO of Hydro One. Soon the Liberals will be giving us prepaid hydro meters, a gift that keeps on giving—to the shareholders of Hydro One, that is. Ontarians will have to keep plugging that meter, because when it runs empty and the power goes off, there's going to be a lot of families, seniors and vulnerable people left in the cold.

Speaker, Conservatives definitely aren't known for their giving spirit. They plan to take \$6.1 billion out of fundamental services and agencies, though they haven't told us which ones yet. And, of course, they are going to leave the Liberal hydro scheme as it is, a lump of coal in everyone's stocking.

New Democrats fundamentally oppose the privatization of our hydro system and we want to embody the right kind of giving spirit this holiday season. We want to give those prepaid meters back to the Liberals and give Hydro One back to the people of Ontario, where it rightly belongs, and we have a plan to do just that.

MAUREEN PRINSLOO

Ms. Soo Wong: Today I rise in the House to remember Maureen Prinsloo, an extraordinary constitu-

ent in Scarborough–Agincourt and outstanding advocate for the people of Scarborough.

Maureen passed away on December 2 at the age of 79. Maureen was an exceptional voice for the people of her community not because of political tact or strategy but because she worked tirelessly for change no matter the political price.

1510

As a private citizen, Maureen successfully lobbied for the city of Scarborough to build a water-retention pond to mitigate extreme flooding. Her persistence made her an ideal candidate for city councillor in Scarborough, a post she held for 10 years. She also represented Scarborough on the Metro Toronto council and served as deputy chair.

Maureen is most noteworthy for her work as the chair of the Metro Toronto Police Services Board. She recognized the changing landscape of Toronto and the necessity of a police force that mirrors and respects its community.

In the words of former Metro chairman and MP Alan Tonks, Maureen “wasn’t standing up to hear herself talk. She was up there to deliver a message and her message was usually one of inclusiveness and strengthening a sense of community.”

We need more politicians like Maureen. Scarborough–Agincourt will miss Maureen and look fondly on her work as a strong advocate for her community.

DIAGNOSTIC SERVICES

Mr. Ross Romano: PET scanners are a diagnostic tool that allows doctors to better diagnose various problems such as cancer, heart illnesses and neurological diseases. Currently in my riding in Sault Ste. Marie, there is no PET scanner available. In fact, between northern Ontario and northeastern Ontario, there are no PET scanners. If somebody needs a PET scan, if they’re diagnosed for that, they have to travel all the way to the GTA.

Hon. Bill Mauro: That’s not true.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Mr. Ross Romano: In order for them to travel to the GTA—

Hon. Bill Mauro: Speaker, that’s wrong. You can’t say things that are not true.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. The minister will come to order.

Hon. Bill Mauro: It’s just not right.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The minister is warned.

I find it disheartening that I have to stand during statements. There is a tradition in this place that statements are for your ridings, and they should stay that way.

The member may continue.

Mr. Ross Romano: Thank you, Speaker. In Sault Ste. Marie, we do not have a PET scanner. When somebody needs to get a PET scan done, they need to travel all the way to the GTA to be able to get that much-needed tool.

The sad reality is that, for a community like Sault Ste. Marie, to get to the GTA, you’re getting in your car and driving eight hours in order to get that much-needed diagnostic tool. And the harsh reality is that you’re driving alone. You are going about this whole process on your own without the comfort of your friends and your family members nearby. Sometimes you’re receiving extremely devastating news when you get to where you are going. You have to endure that alone, without the comfort of your family and your friends.

Sault Ste. Marie needs a PET scanner now. I am very happy that in the People’s Guarantee the PC caucus has agreed and has committed to ensuring that a mobile PET scanner will be available in northern Ontario and available in Sault Ste. Marie, and that is a great—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Further members’ statements?

COMMUNITY NEWSPAPERS

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: I rise in the House today to speak about how instrumental local news and newspapers are to communities across the province. Regardless of community size, local news is an important source of information that creates jobs in even the smallest of communities.

In my riding of Kingston and the Islands, we are lucky to have many sources that deliver local, regional and national news to Kingstonians. I am truly honoured to be joined by reporter Steph Crosier from Kingston Whig-Standard, one of Canada’s oldest daily newspapers.

Local papers cover everything from the latest city council meeting to classifieds to national news, providing Ontarians with information most relevant to them and their communities. Not only is it important to advise them of events in their towns and cities; it’s a way to share community stories, issues, history and information. Reporters who work on these stories often know the people that they are interviewing, which adds further depth to the stories that they tell.

However, it’s becoming clear that this industry is changing. In Kingston and the Islands two local papers, the Kingston Heritage and the Frontenac Gazette, both face uncertain futures in our community. Unfortunately, these changes have led to closures, job losses and the shuttering of newspapers and dailies in our province.

This is a statement which is a tribute to our local newspapers across the province and the staff and the reporters who work within them. Support your local newspapers.

Merci beaucoup. Thank you. Meegwetch.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Norm Miller: I rise today to support the application by Huntsville’s Fairvern nursing home for 20 additional beds. Fairvern currently has 76 beds and a waiting list of 143. Across the province, there are more than 32,000 Ontarians waiting for long-term-care beds.

Seniors waiting for spaces in long-term care put pressure on our entire health care system. Many are

forced to stay in alternate-level-of-care beds in hospital while they wait for long-term care or for home care.

We all know that hospital overcrowding is an issue province-wide. Recently, at West Parry Sound Health Centre, 21 of the 70 acute care beds were occupied by patients waiting for long-term care or home care. The story is similar at other hospitals in the area.

At 76 beds, Fairvern is a smaller nursing home and has applied for this additional capacity in order to ensure its financial sustainability. Without this expansion, there is concern that Fairvern may be forced to close.

The community is behind this expansion. Both the town of Huntsville and the district of Muskoka have committed to invest in the redevelopment. The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care is holding a public meeting next Tuesday, December 12, at Huntsville Public Library. Unfortunately, I am unable to be there, as I will be here at the Legislature, Speaker.

I reiterate my support for Fairvern's proposal and encourage the minister to approve this expansion, and I encourage residents of Huntsville to attend the public meeting to communicate the need for more long-term-care beds in the area.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank all members for their statements.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I beg leave to present a report on Employment Ontario, section 3.04 of the 2016 annual report of the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario, from the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and move the adoption of its recommendations.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Mr. Hardeman presents the committee's report and moves the adoption of its recommendations.

Does the member wish to make a short statement?

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: As Chair of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, I'm pleased to table the committee's report today entitled Employment Ontario (Section 3.04, 2016 Annual Report of the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario).

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the permanent members of the committee at the time this report was written: Lisa MacLeod, Vice-Chair; Bob Delaney, Vic Dhillon, Han Dong, John Fraser, Percy Hatfield, Randy Hillier and Monte Kwinter.

The committee extends its appreciation to the officials of the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development, and the Ontario College of Trades, for their attendance at the hearings.

The committee also acknowledges the assistance provided during the hearings and report-writing delibera-

tions by the Office of the Auditor General, the Clerk of the Committee, and staff in legislative research.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I move adjournment of the debate.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Debate adjourned.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON REGULATIONS AND PRIVATE BILLS

Mr. Ted McMeekin: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Tonia Grannum): Your committee begs to report the following bill without amendment:

Bill Pr75, An Act to revive Jetterance Canada Ltd.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed? Agreed. Carried.

Report adopted.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

CO-OPERATIVE CORPORATIONS AMENDMENT ACT (AUDIT EXEMPTIONS AND LIMITS TO NON-MEMBER BUSINESS), 2017

LOI DE 2017 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES SOCIÉTÉS COOPÉRATIVES (DISPENSES DE VÉRIFICATION ET PLAFONNEMENT DU VOLUME D'AFFAIRES RÉALISÉ AVEC DES NON-MEMBRES)

Madame Des Rosiers moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 187, An Act to amend the Co-operative Corporations Act with respect to audit exemptions and limits to non-member business / Projet de loi 187, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les sociétés coopératives en ce qui a trait aux dispenses de vérification et au plafonnement du volume d'affaires réalisé avec des non-membres.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

M^{me} Nathalie Des Rosiers: This bill, if adopted, would provide more flexibility to co-op corporations, so that they can respond to their varying needs.

1520

608524 ONTARIO INC. ACT, 2017

Mr. Crack moved first reading of the following bill: Bill Pr78, An Act to revive 608524 Ontario Inc.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Pursuant to standing order 86, the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

NATIONAL DAY OF REMEMBRANCE AND ACTION ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Hon. Indira Naidoo-Harris: I rise today to observe the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women.

This is a sad day for me, Speaker, and for women and Canadians across the country. That's because on December 6, 1989, time stood still for all Canadians and our history changed forever. That's when 14 young women were brutally murdered at École Polytechnique in Montreal. These women were young, just in their twenties. Most were studying engineering, and all were looking forward to lives filled with promise and hope. All of their futures were cut short by a single act of violence. They were targeted by a gunman who said he hated feminists, hated women; a man who carried a list of names under the heading "Feminists to slaughter"; a man who was filled with hatred. What happened that day was a brutal and senseless act of gender-based violence. It was heartbreaking, and it will not be forgotten.

Twenty-eight years have passed, but we must never forget what happened. There is not one of us here today who doesn't think of a daughter, a granddaughter, a niece or a sister without feeling a deep sense of sadness and loss for these young women and their families.

Today we remember those who were lost: Geneviève Bergeron, Hélène Colgan, Nathalie Croteau, Barbara Daigle, Anne-Marie Edward, Maud Haviernick, Barbara Kluczniak Widajewicz, Maryse Laganière, Maryse Leclair, Anne-Marie Lemay, Sonia Pelletier, Michèle Richard, Annie St-Arnaud, and Annie Turcotte. Today we honour them. Today we celebrate them. And today we remember them.

We honour the countless number of women and girls who have experienced gender-based violence in Canada. We honour all the missing and murdered indigenous women, trans women and women in Ontario and around the world whose lives have been harmed, shattered, or lost to gender-based violence.

Speaker, December 6 is the National Day of Remembrance, and it is also a day of action. So it's important that we not only remember, but that we look at the future and how we can move forward together. It's important that we act because the reality is, 28 years after this tragedy, gender-based violence continues to affect

women across our province. The harsh reality is that in Canada, one in every three women will experience some form of sexual assault in her lifetime. The reality is, 83% of all victims of domestic violence are women. And the reality is, women are four times more likely to be a victim of homicide. This is unacceptable. We need to be outraged by the discrimination and violence that still exists. We need to be bold, we need to be vigilant, and we need to keep on fighting any form of violence based on gender. We need to act against the root causes of hatred and violence—the same hatred and violence that also led to the ruthless acts of December 6, 1989, because the tragedies of that day came from the view that women should know their place, should not strive to be as powerful as men and should not have a voice.

Well, Speaker, I have a voice. You have a voice. All of us here in this House and in this province have a voice, and we will say together loudly that it is not acceptable for women and girls to be attacked, grabbed, harassed and put down. As the Minister of the Status of Women, I'm determined to work tirelessly for change—real change. I want to affirm our government's commitment to ending violence against anyone based on gender, gender expression, or gender identity.

At this time, I want to thank all those on the front lines, all of them, fighting gender-based violence on behalf of the people of Ontario: the people who work tirelessly at crisis centres, on help lines, in shelters and community centres across the province; the people who are there when the call comes in for help, who are there to support survivors of gender-based violence and are there to help them heal and move on with their lives.

I also want to recognize all of the women who are stepping up against gender-based harassment, violence and misogyny by saying, "Me too," by sharing their own stories, naming their aggressors and saying, "Enough is enough." Today, Time called them "silence breakers." I want you to know that we hear you, we honour you and we applaud your courage and your conviction.

Everyone deserves to feel safe in their communities, workplaces, homes and in their schools. We are working hard every day to achieve this goal through our strategies to end sexual violence and harassment, to end violence against indigenous women and to end human trafficking, and our efforts to update the Domestic Violence Action Plan.

I would now like to highlight some of the work under way, but I do want to say that we absolutely recognize that there is more work to do. Just last week, front-line workers in hospitality, health, education and community service sectors began training to help recognize and respond to sexual violence and harassment on the job. I was proud to make that announcement with the Minister of Labour. They are doing this through a new program called "It's Your Shift."

We now have paid leave from work for employees dealing with domestic violence and sexual violence, so they can have time to recover and heal, also through the Minister of Labour. We are empowering survivors of

sexual assault by giving them access to free legal advice through the Attorney General. We are investing in pilot projects that train police to provide a survivor-centred response. And because we know violence affects First Nation, Métis and Inuit women more than any group in our society, we are also partnering with indigenous organizations and communities to break the cycle of violence.

This is important work, but, as I said, although we have made progress, we know there is more work to do. Our next step is improving the province's response to domestic violence and creating a gender-based violence strategy, a strategy that will cover a lot of different things. Ending gender-based violence takes commitment. We cannot do it alone. We know that to make real and significant progress, we must work together with our partners and the survivor committee, and we must work together with our colleagues here in the House.

I want to thank all the people who play a vital role in supporting survivors and their families. I especially want to thank the members of Ontario's Roundtable on Violence Against Women, and the Executive and Provincial Committees to End Violence Against Indigenous Women for your invaluable and ongoing counsel. I also want to thank the violence against women roundtable.

We all have a role to play in making our province a place where everyone lives in safety, where everyone is treated equally, free from the threat, fear or experience of gender-based violence, where everyone has a voice, because voices will not be silenced by a ruthless, brutal attack by one man.

On this day of remembrance and action, I encourage everyone to speak out and to challenge the attitudes and the behaviours that lead to sexual violence, that lead to harassment, that lead to domestic violence and other forms of gender-based violence. We must continue to fight to end misogyny. We must fight to end rape culture, and we cannot stop until we have put an end to gender-based violence, once and for all, for all the young women and girls, for all the missing and murdered indigenous women, for all the LGBTQ2+ people and for the 14 women who died senselessly 28 years ago.

1530

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Statements by ministries? Statements by ministries? Last call for statements by ministries. Therefore, it's time for responses.

Ms. Laurie Scott: I rise to speak on behalf of the PC caucus to commemorate the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women.

On this day 28 years ago, the lives of 14 women were violently cut short on the grounds of École Polytechnique in Montreal. They were enthusiastic, ambitious and hopeful young women, who lost their lives in a senseless act of gun violence simply because they were women. Reading about their stories, there hopes and dreams, always brings tears to my eyes, but we need to keep reminding ourselves of what happened and relearning the lessons.

As we mourn their tragic deaths today, we also reflect on the many mothers, sisters and daughters that have been lost to domestic violence and other forms of

violence against women. Statistical data on domestic violence and violence against women shows that more than two thirds of violent incidents against women are committed in private residences, such as the victim's own home.

These women and girls most often experience violence at the hands of a partner, including being beaten, choked, sexually assaulted or threatened with a weapon. This type of abuse is one of the primary reasons for women seeking the protection of shelter services across the province. In 2010, there were almost 31,000 admissions of women and children to the 171 shelters in Ontario that provided services for abused women, and that number has only grown since. These numbers are daunting and show how much more work needs to be done to protect Ontario women.

The government needs to do a better job of maintaining up-to-date statistics on violence against women. I hope that this is something the government is working on, since this data goes a long way to helping our service providers plan and would help the government properly allocate funding, which has not been smooth in recent years.

We owe it to victim service organizations, which work tirelessly to deal with the impacts of violence against women by providing shelter, counselling and support to survivors. Places like Kawartha/Haliburton Victim Services, Hope 24/7 or the London Abused Women's Centre need more ongoing support, especially as they are increasingly dealing with new and complex cases, including those involving human sex trafficking.

As my colleagues know, human sex trafficking is an especially horrifying form of violence against women. It has increased dramatically in Ontario, where 60% of all cases in Canada take place. Ninety per cent of those victims are Canadian born. The average age is only 14 years old. It continues to be one of the fastest-growing crimes happening right here in our communities.

Earlier this year, I was pleased to see the government adopt my private member's bill the Saving the Girl Next Door Act as part of their Anti-Human Trafficking Act, which was an important step forward in fighting this form of modern-day slavery, but more needs to be done to protect our women and girls from this crime.

Moreover, just a couple of weeks ago, I was grateful to get the support of my colleagues for my private member's bill, Bill 120, which calls for mandatory sexual assault law training for judges and justices of the peace. Unfortunately, far too many victims of sexual violence are falling through the cracks of our justice system. We need to give courage to victims to come forward, to share their experiences and full confidence that our justice system is properly trained to deal with these cases.

After all, only a few weeks ago we saw a judge in Quebec speaking very inappropriately to a victim of sexual assault, seeming to make the suggestion that she was in some way responsible for attracting the attention of a man who assaulted her. Comments like this are not only shocking, but they keep coming up again and again in the news. This only serves to discourage victims from

reporting sexual assault and violence, leaving them to suffer in silence. That is why I hope this government will act swiftly to implement my bill.

Last week, the Ontario PC Party launched the People's Guarantee, which includes a commitment to expand Ontario's strategy to end human sex trafficking by ensuring child-abuse victims can testify during court proceedings through closed-circuit television; to add convicted human traffickers to Ontario's sex offenders registry; and to launch a public awareness campaign.

The Ontario PC caucus is deeply committed to protecting our women and girls. Women in our province deserve to live free of fear and brutality, and this needs to be the Ontario government's top priority. There is much more work that needs to be done to prevent tragedies like École Polytechnique from ever happening again, so let's work together to build a province and country that protects our women and girls from violence.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further responses?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It's my honour to rise today on behalf of the New Democrats to join all Canadians in mourning the lives of 14 women that were cut painfully short in a hateful, misogynist act of violence against women at École Polytechnique many, many years ago.

Often, when we talk about this tragedy in our history, we refer to the person who committed this heinous act, but I was glad to hear the minister—and I am, as well, going to—speak about the women who lost their lives that day: Geneviève Bergeron, 21 years old; Hélène Colgan, 23 years old; Nathalie Croteau, 23 years old; Barbara Daigneault, 22 years old; Anne-Marie Edward, 21; Maud Haviernick, 29; Barbara Klucznik Widajewicz, 31; Maryse Laganière, 25; Maryse Leclair, 23; Anne-Marie Lemay, 22; Sonia Pelletier, 23; Michèle Richard, 21; Annie St-Arneault, 23; and Annie Turcotte, 22—young women who were studying at this institution of higher learning, and whose lives were taken by someone who didn't believe women had the right to study, particularly in a non-traditional area of study for women back then, and, for the most part, really today as well, in the field of engineering.

We honour the lives and memories of these women, and in honouring them we also must turn our attention to what's happening currently in the lives of women and girls here in Ontario, around our great country and around the world.

Today, one third of women around the world experience violence in their lives, often by someone who they know and someone who they trust. Half of all women who are murdered have their lives taken by an intimate partner. As we all know, the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls reminds us that First Nations, Inuit and Métis women are not only particularly vulnerable to violence, but we have had a very shameful response to the violence that they have been exposed to over the years. We also know that trans women experience extreme levels of violence as well.

I was in Thunder Bay the other day for the opening of some of the hearings or the discussions from the commit-

tee that's doing the work on missing and murdered indigenous women and girls, and I have to say it's extremely heartbreaking as we listen to the stories that are being shared by the loved ones of women who have gone missing, who have been taken, who have been murdered. It's not acceptable that these incidents occurred in the first place, but to listen to the pain of the families as they describe just a sense that their loved ones weren't valued as equal human beings—it's a very difficult thing for families to recall and to deal with. But for the rest of us, I think we have to acknowledge our responsibility to make sure that the committee that's doing this work brings peace to those families who have lost their loved ones and who, in some cases, still don't know where those mothers, sisters, aunts and daughters are at this very moment.

Violence against women and girls affects everyone. We have to all work together to end the harassment, the mistreatment and the abuse of women and girls around the world and on our doorstep, right here in our province.

1540

Of course, we do draw inspiration from strong women like the silence breakers who have come forward to shed light on sexual harassment and abuse. As was mentioned by the minister, they have been recognized as Time magazine's person of the year for speaking to a movement for change that has only just begun to take hold.

Ontario's New Democrats continue to push for meaningful protections and supports for survivors of domestic and intimate partner violence, including paid leave so that women can access the resources they need to escape violent situations and begin to rebuild their lives.

In the names of those 14 women who were killed 28 years ago, in 1989, and in the name of every women or girl whose life has been impacted by violence, let us work together to create a province and a world where women and girls are respected, where they're safe from harm, and where they're supported and given every opportunity to succeed. That includes things like making sure that their labour is equally valued so that we have pay equity in the province of Ontario, and making sure that we provide base funding for the kinds of services women and girl needs as they escape violent situations. It's a tragedy that here in Ontario most violence-against-women programs, most shelters and most transitional housing programs require that the staff there spend much of their time fundraising instead of providing supports to women because they're simply not funded by the provincial government. We need to make sure that the government steps up to the plate.

PETITIONS

LANDFILL

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I have a petition here to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas municipal governments in Ontario do not have the right to approve landfill projects in their communities, but have authority for making decisions on all other types of development; and

"Whereas this outdated policy allows private landfill operators to consult with local residents and municipal councils but essentially ignore them; and

"Whereas proposed Ontario legislation (Bill 139) will grant municipalities additional authority and autonomy to make decisions for their communities; and

"Whereas municipalities already have exclusive rights for approving casinos and nuclear waste facilities within their communities and, further, that the province has recognized the value of municipal approval for the siting of power generation facilities; and

"Whereas the recent report from Ontario's Environmental Commissioner has found that Ontario has a garbage problem, particularly from waste generated within the city of Toronto. Municipalities across Ontario are quietly being identified and targeted as potential landfill sites for future Toronto garbage by private landfill operators; and

"Whereas other communities should not be forced to take Toronto waste, as landfills can contaminate local watersheds, air quality, dramatically increase heavy truck traffic on community roads, and reduce the quality of life for local residents; and

"Whereas municipalities should have the exclusive right to approve or reject these projects, and assess whether the potential economic benefits are of sufficient value to offset any negative impacts and environmental concerns, in addition to and separate from successful completion of Ontario's environmental assessment process;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Pass legislation, or other appropriate legal instrument, that formally grants municipalities (both single- and two-tier) the authority to approve landfill projects in or adjacent to their communities, prior to June 2018."

Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for the time to present this petition. I'll affix my signature as I agree with this petition.

PHARMACARE

Miss Monique Taylor: I have a petition that reads:

"Universal Pharmacare for All Ontarians.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas prescription medications are a part of health care, and people shouldn't have to empty their wallets or rack up credit card bills to get the medicines they need;

"Whereas over 2.2 million Ontarians don't have any prescription drug coverage and one in four Ontarians don't take their medications as prescribed because they cannot afford the cost;

"Whereas taking medications as prescribed can save lives and help people live better; and

"Whereas Canada urgently needs universal and comprehensive national pharmacare;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to support a universal ... pharmacare plan for all Ontarians."

I fully support this petition. I'm going to affix my name to it and give to page Olivia to bring to the Clerk.

SERVICES FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Mr. Rick Nicholls: A petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"The recent decision by the Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services to put an end to funding for sheltered workshops and special employment services for people with special needs in Ontario. Community Living Chatham-Kent now supports 475 people and their families and employs more than 250 people. The Ministry of Community and Social Services provides 90% of the funding with the remainder coming from donations, fundraising activities, grants and foundations.

"We, the undersigned, are concerned citizens who urge our leaders to act now and put a stop to this decision and reinstate the funding and programs to their previous state."

I wholeheartedly agree with this petition. I will sign it and give it to page Adam.

CHILD CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Shelley Boyd from Coniston in my riding for this petition. It reads as follows:

"Whereas the Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014 commits Ontario to 'a system of responsive, safe, high-quality and accessible child care and early years programs....';

"Whereas recent community opposition to Ontario's child care regulation proposals indicates that a new direction for child care is necessary....;

"Whereas Ontario's Gender Wage Gap Strategy consultation found 'child care was the number one issue everywhere' and 'participants called for public funding and support that provides both adequate wages and affordable fees';

"Whereas the federal government's commitment to a National Early Learning and Child Care Framework provides an excellent opportunity for Ontario to take leadership....;"

They "petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To undertake a transparent policy process with the clear goal of developing a universal early childhood education and child care system where all families can access quality child care programs...."

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it, and ask Vanditha to bring it to the Clerk.

CURRICULUM

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas for six years the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) listened to thousands of former students of residential schools and their families testify to the devastating legacy of this national policy of assimilation;

“Whereas the TRC calls upon ‘the federal, provincial and territorial governments, in consultation and collaboration with survivors, aboriginal peoples and educators, to make age-appropriate curriculum on residential schools, treaties and aboriginal peoples’ historical and contemporary contributions to Canada a mandatory education requirement for kindergarten to grade 12 students’ (CA 62.1); and

“Whereas on July 15, 2015, Canada’s Premiers indicated their support for all 94 Truth and Reconciliation Commission calls to action and said they would act on them in their own provinces and territories;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario urge the government of Ontario to fully implement such a curriculum for kindergarten through grade 12.”

I sign this petition and give it to page Javeriar.

SCHOOL CLOSURES

Mr. Todd Smith: This is a petition entitled “Make Moratorium on School Closures Retroactive to 2016-17.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Minister of Education, Mitzie Hunter, declared on June 28, 2017, a province-wide moratorium on future school closures based on the results of the spring engagement process, stating that the pupil accommodation review process was flawed and should be overhauled; and

“Whereas during the 2016-2017 school year this flawed pupil accommodation review process was used to close schools; and

“Whereas some of these schools are not scheduled to close until the end of June 2018, so that staffing for these schools remains in place for 2017-2018; and

“Whereas it would be consistent with the spirit of the moratorium and the reason for the overhaul of the PAR process, to stop those closures announced after September 2016; and

“Whereas the 2015 Auditor General’s report section 4.3.2 (p. 299) recommends greater funds be put towards maintenance of current schools; and

“Further, whereas the current funding formula does not properly address the needs of schools within rural and northern communities;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“1. Reverse the closure decisions for all schools where those decisions were made after September 1, 2016;

“2. Provide fair and equitable pupil accommodation review processes that school boards must follow, recognising the unique needs of rural and northern communities; and

“3. Review the current funding formula with a goal of developing fair and equitable funding formulae for all rural, northern and urban schools.”

I agree with this and will send it with page Aditya.

1550

LONG-TERM CARE

Miss Monique Taylor: I have a petition that reads, “Time to Care.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas quality care for the 78,000 residents of (LTC) homes is a priority for many Ontario families; and

“Whereas the provincial government does not provide adequate funding to ensure care and staffing levels in LTC homes to keep pace with residents’ increasing acuity and the growing number of residents with complex behaviours; and

“Whereas several Ontario coroner’s inquests into LTC homes deaths have recommended an increase in direct hands-on care for residents and staffing levels and the most reputable studies on this topic recommends 4.1 hours of direct care per day;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to:

“Amend the LTC Homes Act (2007) for a legislated minimum care standard of four hours per resident per day, adjusted for acuity level and case mix.”

I fully support this petition. I’ll affix my name to it and give it to page Davis to bring to the Clerk.

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: I have a petition here.

“To the Legislature of Ontario:

“Whereas podiatrists treat foot pain and injuries in women at twice the rate they treat men;

“Whereas Ontario podiatrists see far too many patients with injuries from the workplace that are entirely avoidable, and are caused by wearing footwear that is inappropriate or outright unsafe such as high heels;

“Whereas clinical evidence demonstrates that wearing high-heeled shoes causes a much higher incidence of bunions, musculoskeletal pain and injury than those who do not wear high heels;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To put their best foot forward, and take swift action to amend the Occupational Health and Safety Act to protect workers from dress codes that mandate unsafe footwear in the workplace.”

I will send this to the table with Iman.

HIGHWAY IMPROVEMENT

Mr. Rick Nicholls: This is a petition to widen the 401 and to install median barriers from Tilbury to London.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas in 2009 the Ministry of Transportation received environmental clearance for six lanes of the 401 between Tilbury to Elgin county;

“Whereas the 401 between Tilbury and London was already known as ‘carnage alley’ due to the high rate of collisions and fatalities there;

“Whereas current work being done on the 401 between Tilbury and Ridgetown will reduce the road to a single lane for up to three years thus making this stretch a serious safety concern;

“Whereas there have already been four deaths, nine serious injuries requiring hospitalization and over eight collisions this summer within the one-lane construction area;

“Whereas the government of the day pledged to invest \$13.5 billion in highway improvements and has sharply increased the fees for driver permits and licence renewal fees which are used for highway maintenance and improvements;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To commit to upgrading the 401 from four to six lanes and install a median barrier from Tilbury to London.”

I agree with this petition, will sign it and give it to page Isabelle.

LONG-TERM CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have this petition that comes from the north end of my riding, and I'd like to thank Janet Gibson. Here it goes:

“Whereas there continues to be a shortage of long-term-care beds in Ontario, resulting in the inappropriate use of acute care beds in Ontario's hospitals; and

“Residents who do need secure long-term care are often forced to move away from their communities, families and friends;”

They petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

“To lift the moratorium on long-term-care licences so that the inventory of long-term-care spaces can be brought to a level that will ease the burden placed on Ontario's hospitals; and

“Ensure that licences are granted for the creation of long-term-care spaces not only in cities but in smaller communities where residents are being forced to abandon everything they've ever known.”

I support this petition, will affix my name to it and ask Vanditha to bring it to the Clerk.

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: “To the Legislature of Ontario:

“Whereas podiatrists treat foot pain and injuries in women at twice the rate they treat men;

“Whereas Ontario podiatrists see far too many patients with injuries from the workplace that are entirely avoidable, and are caused by wearing footwear that is inappropriate or outright unsafe such as high heels;

“Whereas clinical evidence demonstrates that wearing high-heeled shoes causes a much higher incidence of bunions, musculoskeletal pain and injury than those who do not wear high heels;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To put their best foot forward, and take swift action to amend the Occupational Health and Safety Act to protect workers from dress codes that mandate unsafe footwear in the workplace.”

I agree with this petition, sign it and give it to page Andrew.

GUIDE AND SERVICE ANIMALS

Mr. Victor Fedeli: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontario Regulation 429/07 under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 indicates, ‘If a person with a disability is accompanied by a guide dog or other service animal, the provider of goods or services shall ensure that the person is permitted to enter the premises with the animal and to keep the animal with him or her unless the animal is otherwise excluded by law from the premises;’ and

“Whereas the Ontario Human Rights Code speaks to the ‘duty to accommodate persons with disabilities ... in a manner that most respects the dignity of the person;’ and

“Whereas, despite these provisions, many who require, have been medically recommended for and own professional, trained service dogs, including children with autism, PTSD sufferers and others, continue to be denied access to public places; and

“Whereas, in one such case of a Kitchener boy with autism being denied access to have his professional, trained service dog at a Waterloo Catholic District School Board school, an Ontario Human Rights Tribunal ruled against specified accommodations for the boy and his dog at school; and

“Whereas Bill 80, the Ontario Service Dog Act, has been introduced at the Ontario Legislature to strictly prohibit ‘denying accommodation, services or facilities to an individual or discriminating against an individual with respect to accommodation, services or facilities because the individual is a person with a disability who is accompanied by a service dog’; and

“Whereas service dogs perform a series of vital tasks to support those living with disabilities, including serving in guidance, seizure response, mobility assistance, autism and PTSD support, among other medically acknowledged services; and

“Whereas ongoing denial of access means those requiring service dogs are continuing to face further

hurdles beyond the impacts of disability to be allowed the public accommodations they deserve;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Open access to registered service dogs and owners:

"Endorse the legislative requirements of Bill 80, the Ontario Service Dog Act, to end continued discrimination and ensure those requiring service dogs are no longer denied the essential public access they should already be guaranteed."

I agree with this. I sign my name to it and give it to page Sean.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The time for petitions is over.

Just a friendly reminder: The Speaker has a naughty list here with several warnings. You know who you are, so it's up to you.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

BUILDING BETTER COMMUNITIES AND CONSERVING WATERSHEDS ACT, 2017

LOI DE 2017 VISANT À BÂTIR DE MEILLEURES COLLECTIVITÉS ET À PROTÉGER LES BASSINS HYDROGRAPHIQUES

Resuming the debate adjourned on December 5, 2017, on the motion for third reading of the following bill:

Bill 139, An Act to enact the Local Planning Appeal Tribunal Act, 2017 and the Local Planning Appeal Support Centre Act, 2017 and to amend the Planning Act, the Conservation Authorities Act and various other Acts / Projet de loi 139, Loi édictant la Loi de 2017 sur le Tribunal d'appel de l'aménagement local et la Loi de 2017 sur le Centre d'assistance pour les appels en matière d'aménagement local et modifiant la Loi sur l'aménagement du territoire, la Loi sur les offices de protection de la nature et diverses autres lois.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Last time, I believe it was questions and comments from Mr. Hillier—not being here, we're moving on to the third party.

Further debate?

Ms. Cindy Forster: It's a pleasure to rise to speak a little bit to Bill 139. I'm happy that the minister from MNR is here and that our member from St. Catharines is here as well, as he had a few minutes yesterday to speak on this bill, An Act to enact the Local Planning Appeal Tribunal Act, 2017 and the Local Planning Appeal Support Centre Act, 2017 and to amend the Planning Act, the Conservation Authorities Act and various other Acts.

I'm going to keep my comments to the conservation part of the bill. I want to spend my time speaking to the amended legislation, to the conservation act, and perhaps some of its application to conservation authorities,

particularly in the Niagara area, having been involved with this file for the last four or five years.

I want to start, though, by talking a bit about the Thundering Waters project. I'm going to quote a bit from a CBC News Kelly Bennett post back in August. Last summer, activists in Niagara Falls were camping in Thundering Waters, "sharing a habitat with the blue spotted salamanders and black gum trees." They're concerned about these being threatened by a proposed development called Paradise. They're in this 484-acre park near Marineland and it has a mix of habitats, landscapes, Carolinian forest, swamplands, grasslands, a savannah section and 95 hectares of provincially significant wetlands.

1600

To the government's credit, they haven't moved off their provincial policy statements with respect to provincially protected wetlands. I can tell you that you the activists and the people who actually care about our ecosystem and the environment are happy about that. But there are still lots of reports and investigations and studies going on. This project has been in the works for almost two years.

The activists are worried that even though some of the lands will be protected, it may actually box in the species that have flourished in this 484-hectare piece of property.

The article also spoke to Hamilton joining a call for the province to investigate the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority. And as recently as last Monday, I believe it was, the city of Port Colborne had a council meeting where there were many activists out also calling on the government once again to appoint a supervisor, even though we are in third reading of this bill.

Certainly, New Democrats put forward a proposal to have a supervisor—language—appointed in those rare occasions that we need one, like we do in hospitals and schools and other agencies. Unfortunately, the government didn't see fit to include that. I'm sure that over the coming months, there will be other municipalities supporting Port Colborne's call for a supervisor.

The activists say that local politicians, they believe, have not been as transparent as they could have been. The Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority recommended a process called biodiversity offsetting. The government, at one point, in a white paper, had asked for comments from conservation authorities across the province. The NPCA bit on that ask and wanted to try and use this 484-hectare parcel as an area where they could do a pilot on biodiversity offsetting, but environmentalists have decried that issue and, so far, the attention has only resulted in the province designating more wetlands within this parcel. And that's good news.

The conflict there has pitted local activists and local politicians, and our local conservation authority as well. That has led to a lot of controversy around our conservation authority in Niagara: Are you in the development business or are you in the conservation business? That has led to numerous freedom-of-information requests through that agency. I heard yesterday, in a newspaper

article, that the requests have gone from five a year to 36 last year, and they're having difficulty keeping up with those freedom-of-information requests. Many of them are being denied or they're being, in some cases, redacted, blacked out, and that is problematic, I think, for the people who are trying to get the information they need to try and ante up their lobby efforts on this particular project, and on the NPCA in general.

Back in the day—it was probably a couple of years ago now—the mayor of Niagara Falls asked the Premier to witness the signing of a memorandum for this Chinese developer to come in and develop this property. The Chinese developer ended up buying that property from Mountainview Homes. They have a significant investment in there now, but they don't seem to be making much progress with respect to wanting to vary from the current rules on provincially protected wetlands.

I also want to speak to a meeting that happened recently in Niagara Falls. The commenter was John Bacher, who is a veteran conservationist in Niagara and who has worked on the greenbelt review for Sierra Club Canada and others. He was disturbed when he went to this meeting in November, because it was supposed to be an open-forum, public kind of meeting, and when he walked over to the display board in this room that was showing this proposed development for the community and he started to talk about the wetlands, he heard a male voice in the back of the room telling him to stop talking, and he was ordered to leave this public meeting by a security officer.

Thankfully, Carolynn Ioannoni, a Niagara Falls councillor, was in the room at the time, and she was able to convince the security guard that Mr. Bacher should be allowed to stay at the meeting and that it was a public forum. He stayed quiet for the rest of the night.

But he was concerned that in fact there are eight parcels of various wetlands that are recommended for elimination under an amendment, through the official plan, at the city, and that the development is proposed to be on about 120 acres.

He went on to say that this "Wetland 10 is proposed to be cut across for a road" and that it would link the proposed riverfront community to the Chippewa Parkway. He said that the planning group's "justification report" made it clear that "it is their view that the provincial government erred in protecting the eight wetlands" which the amendment seeks to eliminate, and that "it disparages the eight wetlands as 'fragments' whose protected status 'should be removed'" by MNRF.

Under wetlands policy, it's legally possible to down-rate wetlands in response to species loss, but the studies so far have shown that the species are all thriving in numbers, so it wouldn't really meet the criteria to do that down-rating.

I just wanted to put some context to what has been going on with respect to Thundering Waters. The NPCA even went as far as to hire a lobbyist to go out and lobby the government for this development.

Just recently, the new CAO of the NPCA, Mark Brickell, I think his name is, was applauding a local MPP

for supporting their One Million Trees initiative. This came out of a kickoff party that they had a couple of months ago. He's asking the other area MPPs, such as myself and the member from St. Catharines, and perhaps the member from Niagara West—Glanbrook to get onside and support this initiative.

While we all support the planting of more trees, I would just respond that, in fact, when they had their kickoff back in September, I believe it was, and I went online to get an invite to go to the party, I was issued a ticket to attend the party, but the next morning, I had a call from the NPCA telling me that I wasn't welcome to attend their kickoff party to talk about their \$1-million tree planting—I wasn't welcome; it was only for friends and family, of which I was neither—and I wasn't welcome to attend, even though the event was being paid for on the taxpayers' dime.

So I would say to the member for St. Catharines that they're really not interested in us coming on board to support anything that they do.

The member yesterday talked about Bill Hodgson, a well-respected regional councillor and a former mayor of Lincoln, who was censured by this Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority board a few months ago because he dared to speak out about plans for a financial audit, calling for the Auditor General to come in and do an audit. At the end of the day, he was censured.

Just this week, in our local papers, Mr. Hodgson is quoted having talked to the local press to say that he has been trying to get the Gowling report. That was the law firm that was representing Mr. Hodgson when he was censured. He was trying, through an FOI, to get that report. The NPCA is refusing to give him the report that led to his censure. Eventually, he resigned from that board.

1610

Mr. Brickell, who is the new CAO, is quoted at the finance committee meeting at the region this week as saying, "We're developing a strategy to reach out to even the most disenchanted members of our community." At the same time that he is saying this, they are denying Mr. Hodgson the right to see the report that censured him and led to his resignation. Right after they said that, four of the board members who also sit on the finance committee at the region—they are board members at the NPCA, and they sit on the finance committee—voted against allowing Ed Smith to make a presentation. I see this as kind of like a Peyton Place saga. It's this week's drama.

Ed had asked to get on the agenda of the finance committee. He asked to speak to the budget process of the NPCA. Their budget was on the agenda for the region, and he asked to have the right to speak to it, in light of the fact that they had sued him and spent hundreds of thousands of dollars of taxpayers' money suing him, as well as suing a former employee—and the legal costs that will go along with that, and perhaps the personal legal costs of other people who may have been involved.

They had his presentation in advance. They never told him not to appear. But he showed up at the meeting, and

then they said, "Oh, no, you can't speak. We don't like your presentation. You need to change your presentation and then we will consider letting you speak." He said that he wasn't prepared to change his presentation. In fact, he had just had a lawsuit decision several weeks ago that said that as taxpayers, as citizens in our community, we have the right to ask questions, we have the right to make comments and we have the right to elicit answers from our elected officials.

They sued him. Superior Court judge Ramsay—very well respected—gave a scathing decision on the NPCA. Still he arrives at this regional council meeting to make a representation on the new budget of the NPCA, and he is denied the right to make that presentation. The communication isn't improving. That strategy isn't working, so I would say that you need to get yourself a new strategy.

All that people really want in Niagara—and I think all of you will agree, probably in any of your ridings—is transparency. They want accountability, they want integrity and they want trust when people are spending their tax dollars and developing programs or services in the community. Unfortunately, they are not getting that in this agency.

We've talked about this a lot. Certainly at the committee level I tried to address some of those issues by the appointment of a supervisor. I raised the issues, as did the member from St. Catharines, about appointments to jobs when you were sitting as a board member, and all you have to do is take a leave of absence and then you are appointed to the top jobs with the agency that you're supposed to be the watchdog on. You end up with the top job as the CAO or the director of operations.

There is something wrong with that when those kinds of things happen. That's what we used to call the old boys' club. I think it's still alive and well.

Mr. James J. Bradley: It's cronyism.

Ms. Cindy Forster: Cronyism. Yes, maybe cronyism. It's still alive and well there.

I raise these issues because I think that through the process of amending the conservation act—which hasn't been amended for quite some time—we could have addressed some of these issues. I even went so far as to put an amendment in that would have seen—if I'm a city employee and I run for city councillor in that city, I then have to resign my position as a city employee. I even went as far as to try to make a stretch that if you are an employee of the conservation authority, because you are getting provincial dollars, regional dollars and local municipal dollars, if you run for a regional council seat, you then should have to give up your position, where it's basically all publicly funded dollars. But that was a bit of a stretch—I get it—because you're not an employee of the local municipality providing those funds, or of the province. But it is problematic when we, as legislators, have to go to that length to try to address some of these issues.

I know that the member from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington yesterday talked about the amendments to the conservation act being all about

Niagara. Well, I can assure you that they're not. I sat through a couple of days of those amendments, and many of the amendments address issues across this entire province. They're not just about the Niagara Peninsula.

We need to find a way to continue to address these concerns. That is why I continue to raise the issues here in the Legislature and locally in our newspaper, because people are very concerned.

I go back to this Thundering Waters project. This is just one of the land issues that have been of concern over the four or five years that I've been closely following the NPCA with respect to property issues in the Niagara Peninsula. There have been other property issues in other parts of my riding, as I'm sure there have been in other parts of the peninsula, that just didn't pass that test. Even in this case, Mountainview Homes held onto that property for probably 20 years in Niagara Falls, and now it is being sold for a huge amount of money, with promises to a developer that probably are not going to be able to be achieved. I just hope that the MNR sticks to their guns and makes sure that we protect this one of, I think, only two pieces of forest and wetlands that actually remain in that part of the peninsula.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. James J. Bradley: I want to commend the member for once again sharing with the Legislature and the audience that may be watching her concerns and the concerns that both she and I have received from constituents in the Niagara area about things that are happening at the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority.

Certainly, the freedom-of-information requests that have been out there are ones that should be responded to in a very positive fashion, including that of Ed Smith, who has been a crusader in this regard—just an average citizen who decided to take upon himself the issues that are confronting the authority.

As the member has mentioned, what essentially has happened is that people who are pro-development have been taking over the leadership of the authority, and those who are more environmentally inclined have been given the pink slip to head out the door, and have been silenced as well with agreements that compel them not to say anything about it. I want to commend the member for that.

She mentions John Bacher, who is an excellent environmentalist. He has run against me as a New Democratic Party candidate—a very good candidate. He has been the heart and soul, along with Gracia Janes in recent years, of the Preservation of Agricultural Lands Society.

1620

She mentions Bill Hodgson, who was bullied off the board. I hope Bill will run for office once again, if he doesn't get bullied out of the field of politics by the bullies who have been attempting to do that to him.

The member herself has been the victim of reprisals and intimidation and bullying, even to the point where they tried to attribute to her something she had nothing to

do with. They brought it to regional council. It was a resolution that had nothing to do with the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority. They thought they could embarrass her; they thought they could silence her. They have not done so, and we see an example of that again this afternoon.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Chatham-Kent-Essex.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: It's a privilege for me to rise in the House and pass comments on, with regard to Bill 139, the Building Better Communities and Conserving Watersheds Act.

Our caucus has looked at this. We've submitted amendments. As a matter of fact, we submitted a total of 46 amendments, yet only two of those amendments were accepted in committee. I thought, "That's terrible," and yet I was told, "No, that's really good, with the way the committees are working right now." It's like, I guess, "We're from the government. We know better."

However, having said that, down in Chatham-Kent and in Leamington as well, we've got two conservation authorities. We've got the Lower Thames Valley Conservation Authority—they do a marvellous job down in our area—as well as ERCA, the Essex Region Conservation Authority. They all do great work in conserving and looking after wetlands and ensuring that things are done right.

One of the concerns we had with regard to this bill is that it allows conservation authorities—bottom line—to trespass, or you could call it "warrantless entry." We've got some concerns about that, and also, the fact that it grants the minister the authority to be able to appoint individuals to the various conservation boards. That can be problematic. When we look at it from the standpoint of allowing that to happen, we have to remember that for the most part, these conservation authorities are funded by municipalities. So, wouldn't you think that maybe municipalities should have a much stronger say in who gets appointed to these various boards?

As you can tell, we've got a number of concerns, and I outlined just a fraction of some of the concerns that we have with this bill. Overall, we will support the bill, but we do have some major concerns.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: It's my pleasure to rise and add a brief comment to Bill 139, the Building Better Communities and Conserving Watersheds Act.

I want to start by commending my colleague from Welland for her tenacity when it comes to dealing with the NPCA. I am not from that area, but from the stories that I have heard not just from her but from other members in this House and from things that I've read in the paper and things I've heard on the radio or seen on TV, it seems like the only goal of the NPCA is to bully people and silence them—for them to be able to do whatever they want, and to bully and silence people.

So I want to thank my colleague from Welland for staying on top of it and not allowing something like that

to continue to happen—to not have community members coming forward and being threatened just for expressing concerns.

It makes me think of something that happened in my area around the Ojibway Parkway. We have a provincial nature reserve owned by the people of the province of Ontario—a beautiful nature reserve in my riding. We were told that our racetrack—I have to point out, under the Liberal government—was going to be closed and bulldozed. A developer came in and announced that they were going to build a big-box development there. So people came forward and expressed concerns, because we have many endangered species within that nature preserve, and they cross the street right where they're going to build this big-box development. We already see these endangered species being killed on a daily basis on this particular road. By building a big-box store there, it is only going to increase traffic and increase the risk to these animals. When citizens came forward and expressed concern, the corporation, the developer, took them to court and sued them and won.

That should not be happening, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Joe Dickson: It's a pleasure to stand on this conservation item. I was pleased to hear from the speaker from Welland—very well done. And the subsequent speakers from St. Catharines, Chatham-Kent-Essex and Windsor West spoke well. It appears that most people are on the same page.

The Conservation Authorities Act has not been reviewed in over 20 years. Back when I was on the boards, both the CLOCA board—the Central Lake Ontario Conservation Authority—and later in life on the executive board, you heard a lot of these things. You could see things evolving in time.

I've also had the opportunity to be a PA for the MNR on one occasion here, and also a PA under our new title, MNRF, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry.

If passed, Bill 139 would provide the province with a new power to ensure environmental protections are in place and to address the oversight concerns for conservation authorities. It's about time on these, and it's well placed by the government. These powers could be delegated by the minister to a third party to supervise the investigation and any necessary changes to the conservation authority. It would be investigating and auditing operations of the conservation authority, compelling a conservation authority to provide any information for the required investigation, and the list goes on.

I can tell you, even to the very bottom, where it says, "force a conservation authority to change their bylaws based on the findings of an investigation"—that certainly is needed.

All of these improvements will make conservation authorities better for everyone in the future.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Welland has two minutes.

Ms. Cindy Forster: Thank you to everyone who commented. And thank you, Mr. Dickson—I don't know your riding, but maybe the Speaker will tell me that.

Yes, I think there have been some pieces put into the bill that, hopefully, when the regulation is put in place, will address some of the concerns that I raised and that the member from St. Catharines raised during those committee hearings—being able to request information, being able to require reports to be written by the conservation authorities, and the piece around the bylaws. I think they'll go some way to addressing some of those issues.

I'm really concerned, though, about the number of tax dollars—people's tax dollars. There's only one taxpayer in this province, whether you're paying municipal or federal taxes. I'm really concerned about significant amounts of tax dollars being paid by this agency and others around FOIs—trying to deny FOIs around suing employees, suing people who actually speak out.

At the region of Niagara, we had a regional councillor who brought an injunction to court to try to stop a conduct report coming out about him. It was \$47,000, and at the end of the day, he's not on the hook to pay that \$47,000. The regional taxpayers are going to have to pay those fees for him, even though he was the person who brought forward the injunction.

It just doesn't seem to me that those kinds of things are right. People work hard for their money, and we shouldn't be wasting their tax dollars like that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I recognize the member from Carleton—Mississippi Mills.

Mr. Jack MacLaren: It is a pleasure to rise in the House to speak to Bill 139, the Building Better Communities and Conserving Watersheds Act, 2017.

There are two problems with this bill, Mr. Speaker: One is that it will end the Ontario Municipal Board, which provides a valuable appeals process to the people of Ontario that is much needed and serves a very worthy purpose; and the other is that it gives enhanced powers to conservation authorities across Ontario, organizations which already have powers to do excessive things: to put in place land use restrictions on private property and take away people's ability to use, enjoy and prosper from the wealth of their property.

1630

First, I would like to speak to the Ontario Municipal Board part of this bill. This bill completely upends the land use planning process by ending the Ontario Municipal Board, which provides for an impartial appeals process. It also gives new and wide-reaching powers to conservation authorities without creating greater oversight and review of their mandate. This is yet another example of Liberal government organized chaos through a confusing, disjointed omnibus bill.

Theresa McClenaghan from the Canadian Environmental Law Association recommends that all schedules in the bill about land use planning be removed. There must be more public consultation on the reform of Ontario's land use planning system. Bill 139 will put added

pressures on our already overburdened court system. The Canadian Environmental Law Association believes that the OMB offers a forum for citizens to participate in reviews of land use planning. According to the Canadian Environmental Law Association, the new procedures outlined in Bill 139 will get rid of essential procedural rights and substantive protections available under the current land use law and policy.

There are many problems with this bill. Here is a short list of some of the more significant consequences:

—It would decimate the board's jurisdiction and powers and reduce the number of matters that may be appealed to the new Local Planning Appeal Tribunal.

—It would limit the grounds of appeal.

—It would limit participation in hearings.

—It would restrict decision-making authority.

—The as-yet-unwritten rules of practice of the new tribunal would prevail over the province's Statutory Powers Procedure Act where there is a conflict over those procedural safeguards.

Mr. Speaker, the environmental lawyers do not think the OMB should be abolished.

I would like to ask the government why they decided to remove two days' worth of public hearings on this bill. Are they afraid that Ontarians will show that this is a bad bill? Are they afraid of criticism? If the purpose of this bill is to reduce a citizen's ability to appeal municipal decisions that may infringe upon property rights, then I understand why the government would want to cut public hearings.

As Signe Leisk from the Advocates for Effective OMB Reform put it, this bill "will do more harm than good." The new process, as outlined in this bill, "will take longer, be more costly and make mediation less likely."

According to the Ontario Society of Professional Engineers, Bill 139 will "compound and exacerbate the problems that exist within the current land use planning system." The bill will also create new problems or other unintended consequences.

The biggest dangers of this new bill are that it damages the appeals process for land use planning, it damages the appeals process for major developers and it damages the appeals process for the ordinary, hard-working people of Ontario. The new bill makes it harder for applicants to get a municipal decision overturned. People make mistakes, and there must be a forum where those mistakes can be tested and adjusted when necessary.

The OMB is not just a forum for debate; it also serves as a watchdog for open and transparent tests of policy decisions. Once the OMB is gone, what institution will provide this necessary oversight to municipal policy?

Right now, courts have decided that municipalities do not have to hold fair hearings at the local level because of the right of appeal to the OMB. If the government gets rid of the OMB, they open the door to a flood of court challenges. Without the OMB, there must be an appeals process at the local level. This puts a heavy burden on

municipalities, and it will be particularly hard for smaller municipalities who may not have the resources to process appeals.

This bill gives too much power to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. It makes them the only person who can appeal certain municipal plans. The public transit plans or an interim control bylaw will no longer be appealable. Also, any plan when the minister has approval authority can no longer be appealed. This gives too much power to one person.

This bill also gives too much power to municipal councillors. Local politicians are susceptible to political pressure from special interest groups who may be opposed to specific projects for reasons that are not justified. Take the case of Lynwood Charlton of Hamilton. Lynwood Charlton, an accredited children's mental health centre, operates a residential care facility for adolescent girls with mental health issues. When they needed a new home, residents in the local area mounted a campaign and put pressure on municipal and planning officials to reject the application because these residents did not want the facility in their neighbourhood.

Lynwood Charlton's application was rejected by municipal council, but they appealed to the OMB and won. Under the new bill, Lynwood Charlton would not be able to meet the new strict guidelines. Under the new bill, the new tribunal would not be able to call or examine witnesses. This deprives applicants of the ability to address biased opinions against them, and it deprives the tribunal from being able to consider expert testimony.

This is an infringement upon the basic rights of appeal. It is an affront to equality, to justice and to fairness.

On conservation authorities: Conservation authorities were created in 1946 to control soil erosion and water levels in Ontario lakes and streams and to protect private property. This was necessary to ensure economic development. But they have evolved. Conservation authorities are more interested in restricting land use on private property. Bill 139 only continues this pattern of applying land use restrictions to private property.

For example, conservation authorities will now be allowed to issue permits to people to engage in prohibited activities. Activities such as developing on hazardous lands, wetlands or interfering with an existing water channel can now be done with the approval of a conservation authority.

Conservation authorities should not have a monopoly over whether a person or a company can engage in activities as important as these. The government thinks it's protecting the environment with this bill, but it is not. Sometimes, it is necessary to manage the environment and natural features in order to support good land use planning strategies or to maintain headwater drainage features.

1640

With this bill, the government is also ignoring all the pain this law and previous laws caused. Decisions made by conservation authorities force good, hard-working

people to go to court to fight for their private property rights. Some of these cases last many, many years. These court fights cause great emotional, physical and mental stress on people. The conservation authorities are telling farmers they cannot farm, but farming is their way of life, so what are they to do?

This bill is effectively expropriation without compensation. Saving wetlands, woodlands, special features lands and endangered species is a desirable thing to do, but this should not be at the expense of property owners unless property owners are properly compensated. If it is in the public interest, the public should pay.

These designations can have financially disastrous consequences for property owners. A designation can devalue a property by up to 85%. Without adequate compensation, property owners are robbed of significant income when they sell their property. For property owners not planning to sell, a designation puts severe restrictions on what they can do—restrictions on building a structure like a house, a barn or a shed; even something as simple as adding a porch or repairing an old porch can be restricted. This is because property owners cannot change the footprint. If a property owner did not raise farm animals, a designation would restrict them from doing so in the future. There are also restrictions on filling up low hollows in fields. Property owners who undertake these necessary improvements to their farmlands risk fines and court visits.

Once designations are placed on a property, each action I just mentioned requires a permit and many studies: an environmental study, a species-at-risk study, flooding studies and more. Not only that, but there are also requests for consultant engineers reports on the effects of the potential change, all at the property owner's expense.

In some instances, these designations are wrong designations. Water diverted from roads and quarries ends up on fields that are private property. This is a drainage problem. These fields should not be called wetlands. To make matters worse, conservation authorities do not always follow their own wetland designations. In some cases, conservation authorities have prevented someone from building in order to preserve a wetland, only to allow a developer a few years later to fill in the wetlands and build a housing or commercial development.

This happened in Stittsville, in my riding. In 2014, the Mississippi Valley Conservation Authority granted a permit that allowed for the drainage, in Stittsville, of the Upper Poole Creek wetland. This was to make way for a shopping mall development. What used to be significant wetlands in Stittsville has been transformed into a massive residential development, equipped with a Giant Tiger, an RBC bank and, of course, an LCBO.

Conservation authorities clearly do not have an issue with developing wetlands. They simply have an issue with private landowners building or farming on their own lands. Conservation authorities are supposed to be protecting wetlands, not destroying legitimate wetlands and then shifting the wetland designation onto a landowner's property.

Since our Constitution of 1867 and our crown grants give property owners the right to own, use and enjoy their land, property owners can pass down these rights to their heirs. With property rights comes the obligation to be responsible, to be a good steward of the land, and to be considerate of your neighbour.

I want to tell you the long, sad story of what the Nottawasaga Valley Conservation Authority did to Alex and Tania Gilmor. Over the last 10 years, the Gilmors tried to build their house on their 10-acre building lot in Simcoe county. The Nottawasaga Valley Conservation Authority said no to their building permit application because the 100-year flood level would prevent emergency vehicles from reaching their new home. The Gilmors appealed to several tribunals and courts over many years. They ended up at the Ontario Superior Court in 2015, where a panel of three judges stated that the Nottawasaga Valley Conservation Authority had overstepped their jurisdiction. They granted the Gilmors the right to build.

The Nottawasaga Valley Conservation Authority appealed to the Court of Appeal of Ontario in 2017, where a panel of three judges ruled against the Gilmors. The Gilmor case is now being appealed to the Supreme Court of Canada. What a waste. All this trouble, time and expense just so the Gilmors can build their home on their lot like all their neighbours have done, along the same road on lots severed off the same farm.

This is an abuse of power and authority by the Nottawasaga Valley Conservation Authority. It wrongfully removed the property rights of the Gilmor family: their right to build their home on their property. This is a glaring example of an unaccountable conservation authority acting in bad faith and willfully hurting Ontario people.

This insidious and irresponsible action and attitude by a conservation authority is prevalent throughout conservation authorities in Ontario. The solution to this problem is to put in place an effective system of oversight and accountability over all conservation authorities in Ontario. The best way to do this would be to restore conservation authorities to their original 1946 mandate to control water levels and protect against erosion in the lakes and streams of Ontario. That would be good conservation. That would be good for the Gilmors.

Mr. Speaker, this is a bad bill. It was hastily crafted and will have drastic impacts on developers, landowners and average citizens in Ontario. It is not too late. The government can still save itself and withdraw this bad bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Once again, Speaker, we learn that the government has ignored northern Ontario. It has been our theme today, as you can imagine. It doesn't take a theme day; you can pick any day in this Legislature when it's a day where northern Ontario gets the short end of something.

The government ignored the north by voting down an amendment that would have required at least one

northern member on the board of the Local Planning Appeal Support Centre. Speaker, that is not a tremendous stretch to ask for. There are appeals that go on all over Ontario and yet we in the north, once again, are in a position where we don't have the same access or services as the rest of Ontario.

1650

That amendment that we brought forward was turned down. One member—that's all we wanted: one member. In fact, as you heard earlier from one of our members, there were in fact 46 amendments that we brought forward, and only two made it. While you would think that that doesn't sound like much, believe it or not, two is remarkable—to see out of this government that somehow two amendments were actually conceded to our organizations.

In the deputations, you will continue to hear stories about the north.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: The member from Carleton-Mississippi Mills clearly has a very different take than we in downtown Toronto. I can tell you that in downtown Toronto, the OMB is the last bastion for scoundrels. We have been fighting for the reform of the OMB as long as I've been here and before I got here. In fact, Rosario Marchese, who used to be the member for Trinity-Spadina, introduced a number of bills, and I have also introduced a bill, trying to get the OMB out of Toronto, so it's absolutely timely that we do something to reform it.

Part of the problem, though, now—and we are inviting about 60,000-plus people into downtown Toronto every year, and I can tell you that our city councillors in the downtown area are spending half of their time running to community meetings and then off to the OMB—is that now developers are going to the OMB right away because there's so much uncertainty, because we don't have regulations. So much is left up to the regulatory bodies, and the government has not been forthcoming with what those regulations look like, so the situation is actually worse right now than it was before the bill was introduced.

It is putting my residents in a really difficult place. They don't know what's going on. It's putting developers, quite frankly, in a difficult place, because they don't know what's going on. Right now, with uncertainty, the situation around developments in my ward 13, where this is the major issue—developments, whether for good or ill, and how one amends them—and certainly in downtown Toronto, where this is the major issue, or certainly one of them. We need clarity and we need certainty.

I would ask the government: Please, please bring in the regulations. Let us know what you plan. Let's get it done.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Hon. Bill Mauro: A point of clarification: The NDP position was that they wanted to abolish—completely, I

think, was the position that was taken—the OMB in its entirety. We've chosen not to do that. We feel there's a necessity to have an appeal mechanism in the province of Ontario, and that is not being changed.

I would also mention that the reason, probably, that the member from Nipissing did not address any of his remarks to the member from Carleton–Mississippi Mills is because probably the member from Carleton–Mississippi Mills feels like he had been ignored, and that is why he has gone off and joined another party, called the Trillium Party.

But, Speaker, that's not what we should be talking about. What we should be talking about is his comments relative to the OMB. The member made comments with regard to property rights as if somehow those are being limited or abolished through this particular piece of legislation. What's happening is just the opposite, and I would think that the member, who made 20 minutes' worth of statements, would have appreciated what is happening here. There is more respect contained in the legislation for the decisions that are being made by locally, municipally elected public officials. I would have expected, quite frankly, that the member from Carleton–Mississippi Mills would have had an appreciation for that. I really would have expected that he would have seen the benefit in that.

There are four or five provincial land use plans in the province of Ontario. We have a provincial policy statement. Municipalities spend a tremendous amount of time developing their official plans, and those official plans are consulted on broadly, over the course of a number of years.

I would ask the member from Carleton–Mississippi Mills and others why they would expect that it would be that after all of that work has been done and all of that work has been consulted on over the course of years, those decisions on some—not all—planning matters would be allowed to be appealed after they had been approved by the province and by local municipal councillors. There is still going to be an appeal mechanism. There will still be an appeal tribunal. We are simply scoping down what it is that they can rule on, showing respect for local decisions.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Rick Nicholls: I had an opportunity to speak to this bill earlier in terms of comments—again, a shout-out to our Lower Thames Valley Conservation Authority and to the Essex Region Conservation Authority.

Over on this side, we do agree that there is a need to reform the OMB. However, the one thing that really concerns us is that—you know, we're elected by the people, and yet, based on the fact that there is a majority government, the committees are in fact top-heavy with government MPPs. Understanding that, and understanding the process, what really disappointed us was the fact that initially there were supposed to be four days of hearings for this particular bill in committee. The very first day, what did they do?

Mr. Michael Harris: What did they do?

Mr. Rick Nicholls: I'm glad you asked that. They passed an amendment to reduce the number of days from four to two. What does that mean? What's the impact of that? Let me tell what you that means. There was a total of 69 groups that applied to be heard; yet now, sadly, over 50 of these groups were unable to speak to committee. We've got a whole list of these.

There are 21 acts that are involved in this particular bill—21. They need to be dissected. They need to be looked at. As my colleague from Nipissing pointed out, we submitted 46 amendments; only two were accepted. Is it because, "Well, excuse me, but I'm from the government and I know better"? It's unfortunate.

One of the key attributes as MPPs is to be able to listen to the people, and they're not listening.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Carleton–Mississippi Mills has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Jack MacLaren: I'd like to thank the member from Nipissing, the member from Parkdale–High Park, the member from Thunder Bay–Atikokan and the member from Chatham–Kent–Essex for their comments.

Mr. Speaker, I feel very strongly that the OMB is a very worthy body and is an independent appeal process on land use planning matters that is absolutely necessary.

Where I live, in eastern Ontario in the city of Ottawa—the second-largest city in this province—we have a city that takes a very restrictive view of rural as opposed to urban. Even though we live in one city, they want to treat us all the same. They want to save the rural area as green park space, meaning no economic development at all, which devalues our property hugely and prevents us from doing what we want and creating wealth and economic activity. It's wrong. So to the member from Thunder Bay, I say that I do understand. I've lived it. I've been to the OMB—won and lost. But I will continue fighting for my rights.

To the member for Toronto, I would say: If she doesn't want the OMB, more power to her. I'm with her all the way. But the local tribunal process is like appealing to the fellow who victimized you in the first place. That's no appeal at all. That's just a waste of time.

The conservation authorities have become obsessive and oppressive agencies that show no regard for private property rights. They are at arm's length from government so they are absolutely unaccountable, and they're growing and becoming more powerful. This bill gives them more power, more authority and greater ability to hurt people like the Gilmor family.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to have the opportunity to speak to Bill 139, the Building Better Communities and Conserving Watersheds Act. Once again, I want to state that this bill should have been two separate bills: one to reform the Ontario Municipal Board, and one to update the Conservation Authorities Act.

I find it interesting that the government talks about how long it's been since the Conservation Authorities Act has been touched. They are right, it has been a long time. But whose fault is that, Mr. Speaker? They could have done this any time over the past 14 years. Now, suddenly, it is so important that they, first, had to combine it with their equally long-overdue reform of the OMB; and then, second, they had to cut off committee hearings, leaving, as we just heard, more than 50 individuals and groups unable to be heard—50. There were 69 people and groups who applied to present to committee, but because they say it's so important that they pass this legislation quickly, the government cut two days off of committee hearings, so that those 50 groups couldn't be heard. If this legislation is so important, why didn't they introduce it sooner? They've had 14 years.

1700

As the opposition critic for natural resources and forestry, I will be speaking primarily about schedule 4 of this bill, the part that amends the Conservation Authorities Act, but before I get into that, I want to commend my colleague the member from Oxford for putting forward many thoughtful amendments to the OMB portion of this bill. Unfortunately, the government members of the Standing Committee on Social Policy didn't see the wisdom in most of his amendments and voted down 44 out of 46 amendments. The only surprise I have is that we actually managed to pass two amendments. But there is one amendment in particular that I would like to highlight, and I hope one of the government members will address why they chose to defeat this amendment.

The member for Oxford moved that the Local Planning Appeal Support Centre be required to include at least one member from northern Ontario and at least one member from a rural area outside of northern Ontario. Given that this support centre is intended to offer support to anyone from anywhere across Ontario who is trying to appeal a local planning decision, it seems only fair to stipulate that the board that directs this organization should represent people from across Ontario, including northern Ontario and rural Ontario.

As the member from Oxford explained, at the public hearings we heard from different groups from northern Ontario, including Environment North and the Sudbury and District Home Builders' Association. These groups explained that planning is quite different in northern Ontario and that northern municipalities don't have the same resources. They were also concerned that the government would overlook the unique needs of northern Ontario when it comes to economic development and growth.

The number one complaint I hear when I travel around northern Ontario is that decisions are made in Toronto for Toronto and southern urban centres—Toronto-centric decision-making that just doesn't work in northern Ontario. Unfortunately, the government wasn't willing to give northern Ontario or rural Ontario a guaranteed voice on the Local Planning Appeal Support Centre board.

The member for Northumberland–Quinte West told the committee that the Public Appointments Secretariat will make sure that all of Ontario is represented on this board. As the member for Windsor–Tecumseh said, we in the opposition don't have the same faith that the Public Appointments Secretariat will really look out for the needs of northern Ontario and rural Ontario.

On behalf of northern Ontario, I want to thank the member for Oxford for his attempt to ensure this government includes a northern voice on the Local Planning Appeal Tribunal Support Centre board. Despite representing a riding in southwestern Ontario, he gets it: Northern Ontarians need a voice on this and so many other provincial boards.

I want to take a moment, Mr. Speaker, to highlight our party's commitment to northern Ontario. As I've said many times, our leader travels to northern Ontario to hear from northerners as often as he possibly can. In fact, since being elected, Patrick Brown has now been to northern Ontario 31 times, including in each winter. It's become a tradition to do a week-long northern road trip, and we have another one planned in January this year, travelling a good chunk of northern Ontario by vehicle.

In the platform he released last weekend, there are 13 commitments to northern Ontario, including one that states that we will "ensure that the voice of northern Ontario is brought to every decision made at Queen's Park by requiring every cabinet submission to include a northern Ontario assessment." I know the member for Nipissing likes to call that putting a northern lens on every possible policy.

Now I want to talk about the conservation authorities part of this bill. Under schedule 4 of the bill, the part that amends the Conservation Authorities Act, I found it interesting that the government members of the social policy committee voted down the third party's amendment to add the word "sustainable" to the purpose of conservation authorities. If the amendment had passed, the purpose would have read, "The purpose of this act is to provide for the organization and delivery of programs and services that further the conservation, restoration, sustainable development and management of natural resources in watersheds in Ontario." I want to point out that our party supported this, and it seems to me that sustainable development should be a goal of conservation authorities. I don't understand why the government members did not support that amendment, but maybe one of them will explain when they speak to this bill.

Section 2 of schedule 4 merges administrative costs and maintenance costs under the catch-all heading of "operating expenses." This will include:

"(a) salaries, per diems and travel expenses of employees and members of" a conservation authority,

"(b) rent and ... office costs,

"(c) program expenses,

"(d) costs that are related to the operation or maintenance of a project, but not including the project's capital costs, and

"(e) such other costs as ... prescribed by regulation."

This seems to make a conservation authority's books less transparent and therefore makes the conservation authority less accountable to the residents and taxpayers. Our party did raise this issue in committee, but the government members did not respond to our concerns, so we have what appears to be making this less transparent than it has been in the past. That's the wrong way to head, as far as I'm concerned.

Now let's get on to the topic of qualifications for conservation authority members. One of the biggest concerns our party had with the amendments to the Conservation Authorities Act centres around the provision that would give the government the right to set qualifications for conservation authority members.

Currently, most conservation authority members are councillors of local municipalities that fall within the area of authority. This only makes sense since local ratepayers, through their municipalities, fund conservation authorities. Who better than the locally elected councillors to represent the views of those ratepayers?

Mr. Speaker, I want to quote Lynn Dollin, president of the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, on this issue. In her presentation to the committee, she said, "Municipal councillors are representative of all walks of life in an area, and it is the council that pays the greatest proportion of the conservation authority's funding. However, section 40(1)(a) of the bill indicates that the Lieutenant Governor in Council 'may make regulations governing the composition of conservation authorities and prescribing additional requirements regarding the appointment and qualifications of members of conservation authorities.' AMO has consistently maintained that until the province reinstates significant funding to conservation authorities, municipal government, as the major funder, should have sole right to appoint board members." I agree with that statement.

A director within the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry did speak to the committee in response to this concern, and he basically said the government didn't know how they would use this clause. He said, "What's being proposed is just the legislative authority to create a regulation to entertain that idea, at which point we would undertake consultation going forward."

1710

Mr. Speaker, that is ridiculous. If the government can't tell us how they would use this provision, they should not be introducing it. The member from the third party for Windsor-Tecumseh asked a number of good questions about the role of these members appointed to satisfy the government's qualifications and whether they would be allowed to vote and have a say in programs and services that would result in tax increases without having to answer to the taxpayers—a very good question.

Despite a long discussion and many questions which the government could not answer, the government members defeated our amendment to strike this section of the bill.

It is ironic that in the main section of this bill dealing with reforming the OMB, the government is talking

about giving more authority to municipal government, but in the conservation authority section they are setting up a system which would allow them to take control away from municipalities—perhaps more evidence that these should have been two separate bills.

Another section of the bill that I'd like to talk about is the section to do with warrantless entry. Another section of this bill which we in the official opposition have concerns about is the increased rights of warrantless entry for conservation authority officers. In my speech during second reading, I read out the existing legislation and the changes proposed in this bill. I won't read those out again, but I want to point out that this bill does increase the powers of warrantless entry for conservation authority officers.

The existing act stated that an authority or its officer shall not enter property without consent or warrant except in very specific cases. I think that's reasonable. This bill proposes to change that to say that an officer appointed by an authority "may ... enter any land situated in the authority's area of jurisdiction for the purposes of determining compliance with" regulations or with the conditions of a permit. This bill will give conservation authority officers pretty broad powers to enter just about any property within their jurisdiction.

Mr. Speaker, I know that I said this in second reading debate, but I feel I must repeat it: This is a pattern with this government. A number of government bills over the past years have expanded entry without a warrant, and slowly but surely they are chipping away at the privacy rights of property owners.

Ontario Farmer magazine recently ran an article about this issue. Farmers are concerned not because they don't want conservation officers on their land but because they have extensive biosecurity procedures to ensure the health of their animals and crops and, by extension, the health of their businesses. Farmers asked that officials from the Local Planning Appeal Tribunal and from conservation authorities be required to give notice when they are planning to visit a farm. That way the farmer can be available to make sure that the officer abides by the procedures to ensure they aren't bringing any contamination onto the farm, and simple things like making sure that they close gates properly so animals can't get out.

This government is doing something similar in the proposed Local Planning Appeal Tribunal Act, giving tribunal members powers to enter property at their will. I want to quote from the Ontario Federation of Agriculture submission to the committee regarding these powers:

"While we see value in tribunal members familiarizing themselves with the site and surroundings of an appeal, we object to granting a tribunal member or employee the powers to enter and inspect without a warrant. A prearranged site visit is one thing. An unscheduled site visit is completely different. OFA would support, and even encourage, pre-arranged site visits. A warrantless, unannounced visit to enter and inspect is excessive and unnecessary. Many farm operations utilize biosecurity provisions to minimize the risks of disease, pathogen or

pest transfers to livestock, poultry and crops carried on vehicle tires or footwear. Simply put, restricting access to farms minimizes the risks of disease transfers. Warrantless entry fails to acknowledge that unannounced entry into areas frequented by livestock or crops can pose a risk not only to those animals or crops, but also to the entrant themselves, as they are unaware of potential risks inherent on the farm. Entry to farms should only come after direct contact with the farmer, and after any farm-specific biosecurity protocols have been followed.”

Mr. Speaker, I agree with that.

“The Ontario Federation of Agriculture recommends that the warrantless entry and inspection provisions in the proposed Local Planning Appeal Tribunal Act, 2017 be dropped and replaced with provisions that clearly indicate that only pre-arranged site visits are allowed.”

As I say, Mr. Speaker, I think that makes complete sense for the points noted.

Unfortunately, this government that makes decisions in downtown Toronto without truly consulting with farmers and other groups in rural Ontario just doesn’t get it. Biosecurity on farms is so important to ensuring our food supply and the livelihood of our farmers. Our farmers take it seriously. This government is putting all of their hard work in jeopardy by giving Local Planning Appeal Tribunal members and conservation authority officers the power to wander onto farms without speaking to the farmer first.

The provisions for warrantless entry in the existing Conservation Authorities Act are reasonable. They allow entry without a warrant if there are “reasonable grounds to believe that a contravention of the regulation is causing or is likely to cause significant environmental damage and that the entry is required to prevent or reduce the damage.” That’s the existing legislation. That’s reasonable. That strikes the right balance between the need to stop and prevent environmental damage with the privacy rights of property owners.

We asked in committee whether the government could provide evidence as to why they felt conservation officers needed these increased powers of warrantless entry, and the government members could not cite an example where this was needed. Our party did propose amendments to strike these expanded powers of warrantless entry and to keep the provisions in the existing Conservation Authorities Act, but the government defeated those amendments.

I am proud that our leader is committed to—and I am quoting from our platform here—“ensure that all ministries have respect for and understanding of the importance of protecting private property rights and each ministry will have to demonstrate a strong public need to encroach on private property rights.”

That should not have to be said, but given this government’s record of expanding powers of warrantless entry at every opportunity, it is important that our party stands up for property owners.

Mr. Speaker, I can see that I am out of time, so I will end now.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: It is my pleasure to rise again to add a brief comment to Bill 139, the Building Better Communities and Conserving Watersheds Act. I’m looking forward to doing my 20 minutes on it very shortly.

I want to start, though, by just clarifying something that the Minister of Municipal Affairs said the last time we were doing questions and comments on this. He actually said that the NDP wanted to abolish the OMB. Now, earlier today, I believe the minister was yelling across the floor to the Conservatives, “Facts matter. Get your facts straight. Facts are important.” To the minister: The fact is that the bill that was brought forward was actually to get rid of the OMB in Toronto—believe it or not, the province is larger than the city of Toronto—because Toronto already has mechanisms in place to do the same thing the OMB does. So I just wanted to make it clear for the minister that we did not say abolish the OMB. That is not what we said. And facts really do matter.

1720

Again, I’m just going to mention some of my concerns around the OMB, and it’s welcome to see that there are reforms around the OMB in here. It was a long time coming. We do have some concerns about the bill. It was long time coming, though, for OMB reform.

In my comments, I will once again talk about a particular case in my riding around Ojibway Park and the fact that there were private citizens who came forward and expressed concerns about a developer building a big-box building, a retail outlet, near the nature preserve, and mentioning that with the increased traffic that would bring forward, we would see many endangered species being killed on a road that runs beside where that big box is planned. The response to that, through the OMB, was this big-box company suing two private individuals for expressing concern and raising those concerns with the public so that the public would understand what was going to happen, and give more people in that part of the community an opportunity to come forward and share their concerns. This shouldn’t be happening when private citizens raise their concerns: for them to be sued and for the OMB to let big-box developers get away with it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry.

Hon. Kathryn McGarry: It’s a pleasure to rise again today and add a couple of comments to the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka and his comments on Bill 139.

I also wanted to welcome Kim Gavine, general manager of Conservation Ontario, and Dick Hibma here today to watch the rest of the debate.

As you know, if passed, Bill 139 would provide the province with new powers to ensure environmental protections are in place and to address oversight concerns for conservation authorities. We introduced the bill after a two-year consultation period across Ontario.

The member opposite has raised concern about warrantless entry and the ability of conservation officers to enter a landowner's property when there is a serious risk to our province's natural resources. The Canadian Environmental Law Association and the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority support this section of the bill, as there have often been times where staff have not been able to prevent environmental damage due to a lack of access to private property.

Again, the member opposite has raised concerns about this, which he did in committee, so let me read a quote from Hansard. The member opposite said, "Do you have any concerns with the changes to warrantless entry onto private property that make it easier to go onto private property without a warrant?"

The response from Ms. Theresa McClenaghan from the Canadian Environmental Law Association was as follows: "We don't oppose the provisions because there's a robust body of law about when it's reasonable to exercise those types of provisions. Those would be subject to regular judicial review to make sure that those authorities are not abused."

Speaker, the member opposite knows this. He knows how people feel, and I believe he's trying to simply score cheap political points. He's not concerned about protecting the natural resources; otherwise, he would support warrantless entry, knowing that there's a robust body of law that exists to ensure it's used appropriately and is subject to regular judicial review.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I had spoken earlier about the fact that no northern members were allowed to be put on the board of the Local Planning Appeal Support Centre, and the fact that the government again ignored the north. The support centre will be set up to serve individuals from across the province, Speaker, and the board should reflect this as well. Planning issues are different across the province, so it's crucial that we reflect this within the support centre board of directors as well.

We heard about the difference in the north from the Sudbury home builders, as a "for instance," when they asked the committee to travel there for committee hearings. They said, "Bill 139 ... proposes substantive amendments to the scope, powers and function of the OMB. The proposed legislative changes will have considerable implications for economic development and growth in northern Ontario. Our members are very concerned that the unique circumstances and needs of northern Ontario may be overlooked by the government and we respectfully request the standing committee make the effort to travel, not just to hear from the Sudbury and District Home Builders' Association, but also from other businesses, municipalities and members ... the views of northern Ontario must be heard on this important piece of legislation." Of course, Speaker, that never happened.

Karen Peterson from Environment North said, "Planning issues are quite different in this region." She went on to say, "Northern townships are experiencing

increased pressure to develop lands in populated areas, yet the local planning boards are not as equipped as the GTA municipalities that have extensive bureaucracies and sufficient funds to hire subject matter experts."

That's why we need to be involved in these organizations, Speaker. We need to be involved, because it's different in the north. It's different in the north.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Further to our member from Windsor West's comments, I just wanted to address what the Minister of Municipal Affairs said. If he wants to check out the actual facts here, he can go downstairs to the Speaker's party after and speak to Rosario Marchese himself, who happens to be downstairs.

But suffice it to say, both he and I brought in bills to reform the OMB, not to get rid of it but, in particular, to take it out of the affairs of Toronto, because Toronto has its own planning department. It is extensive.

The frustration of our citizens, the frustration of the folk that we represent, is that their voice is not heard to the same degree that the developer's voice is heard. And why? Let's put it this way: If you go to the OMB and you're a developer, you have a lawyer. You have a planner that you've hired. You have deep pockets and—good on you—you tend to win. If you're a citizens' group and you go to the OMB, you have bake sales to raise money for a lawyer, for a financial appeal. There could be a thousand more of you than the two developers appealing there, but you don't have the money. And guess what? Even worse, if you lose, the developer can counter-sue you for their costs—and it has happened. That's why the current situation is so unfair.

You can imagine what our city councillors are up against in Toronto. They're doing this every day. They're having community meetings every night in the downtown core, and so are we, of course, as MPPs who represent them.

The situation is untenable, and it's worse now because there is uncertainty. So I'll continue to harp on this when I'm able.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Parry Sound–Muskoka has two minutes.

Mr. Norm Miller: Thank you to the member from Windsor West, the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry, the member from Nipissing and the member from Parkdale–High Park, who made some comments on my speech.

The member from Windsor West had some OMB concerns. We did sit through the shortened committee hearings. The member from Oxford, in particular, listened intently to many, many groups and put forward some 46 thoughtful amendments after listening to the groups. Unfortunately, only two of those amendments actually passed.

To the Minister of Natural Resources, I would recommend that you read my Hansard from second reading debate, where I actually read the existing conditions that allow for warrantless entry in some conditions. In the

existing legislation, it seems completely adequate, including dealing with environmental emergencies. I just suggest that you go back and read that Hansard.

The member from Nipissing was standing up for northern Ontario. As was pointed out, we put forward an amendment trying to get some northern representation. That was turned down by the government. As he pointed out, the north is different. All we were asking for was some representation so that those different views would be respected and the unique needs of the north would be recognized and the challenges would be listened to. Unfortunately, the government turned down that suggestion.

Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: It's my pleasure to rise again on Bill 139, the Building Better Communities and Conserving Watersheds Act. This time, I have a little more than two minutes to speak to it, so hopefully I'll get through some more detail.

I want to start by saying that I am happy to see that the bill aims to significantly alter the review process for local planning decisions in Ontario and will give municipalities more authority in the process. The most significant change here is the replacement of the Ontario Municipal Board with the Local Planning Appeal Tribunal.

1730

I just want to point out to people who aren't familiar with the OMB that it is an unelected and unaccountable body and has broad powers to make policy decisions. Just let that sink in a little bit: They are an unelected and unaccountable body that has broad powers to make some pretty important policy decisions. OMB members do not need to have any professional credentials, despite being given so much authority. For these reasons, this bill's reforms are welcome.

The changes that are being proposed here are substantial, and while there are many aspects of this bill that are long overdue—and that's putting it lightly—there are also some important considerations to be taken into account. These are long-overdue reforms. Years and years we have waited for reforms when it comes to the OMB. The Liberals have been promising change for close to 15 years on this.

My main issue with this bill is something we have seen time and time again with legislation that this Liberal government has introduced. There are good reforms included here, but there is so much that we don't know. So much of the bill's substance is left up to regulation and the discretion of the minister. How do we know it will actually be more responsive and effective?

I'm also concerned about the timelines surrounding this legislation. We waited years and years for change on this file, but we don't know if the reform of the Ontario Municipal Board will happen before the next election.

The Conservative government from 1996 to 1997 made drastic cuts to funding for conservation authorities.

Under the NDP in 1992, conservation authorities were receiving close to \$52.8 million. The Conservatives dropped that down to \$8 million. So it went from \$52.8 million to \$8 million. The conservation authorities will need more funding in order to fully implement their new responsibilities in this bill.

We all saw what happened just a few short months ago back in my riding of Windsor West, in the riding of Windsor-Tecumseh and in the neighbouring riding of Essex. For the second time in less than a year, Windsor-Essex residents experienced devastating flooding. Extreme weather events like this are only going to become more common as a result of climate change. It is going to take a lot of funding to protect communities from future disasters related to climate change.

This bill proposes that municipalities consider climate change issues when developing their plans, but they will need funding for this, Speaker. It will be impossible for municipalities to ensure that their conservation authorities are complying with the changes in this legislation without being supported with additional funding. Since the government has not spelled out additional funding for expanding conservation authority programs, are we left to assume that municipalities will be left to pick up the tab? Large cities aside, what about smaller communities? There is no planning support in this bill for northern or rural communities that may lack the capacity to make planning decisions. That could have negative impacts on the environment.

I touched briefly on the recent incident in Windsor and the fact that we have had major flooding twice in less than a year. I want to take the opportunity, since I raised it and we are talking about climate change and conserving watersheds and such, to talk about what the people in Windsor and Essex county went through during those two separate floods.

For many people within Windsor and Essex county, they didn't just get hit once. Although some were only impacted by one of the floods, there were many people who were really just getting through the cleanup and getting their lives back together, rebuilding what they had lost within their homes. Those are the things they can replace—when we're talking about floors and we're talking about walls and we're talking about electronics and couches and things—if they could afford to replace those things. But they are replaceable. There are many things that are not replaceable, like family memories. Some people lost their marriage licences. They lost their family photos from their parents' or their grandparents' weddings, pictures of themselves growing up, pictures of their children and of important anniversaries and important celebrations and moments in their lives.

Those are things that they will never get back. And here they are, thinking that at least they have an opportunity, either through their insurance or through the disaster relief fund something, to claim something so that they can get some sort of finances in place in order to replace the things they can, to go out and make the purchases they need to purchase, whether that's new

furniture, new drywall, new flooring or whatever the case may be, so that they start to help rebuild their lives.

Unfortunately, many of them didn't qualify for disaster relief funding. They may have got funding through their insurance the first time they got flooded, but the second time it happened to them, many of these people were denied funding through their insurance company. Many found out through the second flood that they no longer actually had flood insurance through their insurance company, that it had been removed from their policy. I know this has been a sore spot for the insurance industry. Trust me, they have contacted me for making these comments. I respect the fact there are many insurers out there who did indeed contact policyholders and gave them a heads-up to let them know they were not going to have flood insurance anymore. But there were many that did not communicate this to these homeowners. There were many people who found out the hard way that they had no coverage under their insurance anymore.

For many people in my area, people who haven't made a flood claim and who would like to add flood insurance to their home, just in case we get a third, a fourth, a fifth, a sixth flood—which is highly likely, based on climate change and based on what we are seeing and patterns in our area—many people who have decided they want to be proactive and add flood insurance to their policy are finding out that it's not available to them because the companies just don't want to offer it to people in our area, or that it is completely unaffordable, that there is no way they could afford to add flood insurance to their home, and that's really unfortunate.

They had a glimmer of hope when the minister stood up and said, "Well, there's the disaster relief fund and the majority of people are going to get money"—although I believe, in the beginning, he was saying that everybody would be taken care of. But the fact of the matter is, the majority of the people in Windsor and Essex county will not qualify for that funding, did not qualify for that funding and will not qualify in the future, because that coverage, that program, does not cover sewer backups. Although many people experienced overland flooding—for those who aren't familiar with that term, when it's coming in through your foundation, when it's coming through a window, when it's coming in through a door, that's called overland flooding. That's covered under this plan, but what isn't covered is sewer backup. So if it comes up through your floor drains, it's not covered. Unfortunately, in our area, when it floods, it does both. So many people who should qualify are being disqualified by the government because water came up through their drainage pipes, through the sewer.

I know myself, my colleague from Windsor-Tecumseh and my colleague from Essex have raised this on numerous occasions, that it is unfair to the people of our area or any other municipality in this province to have a government saying that they're going to take care of them through this fund, only for these people to find out they're not covered, that they will be disqualified, or

have to jump through hoops to try and get this money, and for it to drag on for months. In some cases, people who had applied from the first flood were still waiting for that funding when the second flood hit. All they want to do is start to rebuild their lives, and they feel like the government has turned their back on them.

Another piece that I've raised a couple of times that I want to talk about when it comes to the OMB and the much-needed reform to the OMB is a very specific piece to my riding, which is Ojibway Park, a provincial nature reserve. It is an incredible gem located in my riding, right on the border, basically, between my riding and the member from Essex's riding. The issue there is, so many people go. People take photos from inside Ojibway Park all the time—incredible photos of animals and wildlife that you may not be able to see anywhere else in the province. We have a very large number of endangered species that call Ojibway Park home, species that you possibly will never see anywhere else in the province. That's something we're incredibly proud of.

1740

I know that for some people in the neighbouring areas, who live in the homes and such around Ojibway, that can be a bit of a problem. We've had some discussions with constituents who are upset about the fact that before they go out and they cut the grass that's outside of their fence—the tall grass that they're supposed to keep track of—or around some of the parks in the area, they have to go through and look for snakes, because some of those snakes are endangered species. I know that for some people, that's quite the task, and sometimes it's incredibly frustrating.

I know that for some people, it's frustrating that if they happen to come across one of these snakes, or other endangered species, they have to stop what they're doing and report it, and that that can actually be a cumbersome process for them as it's investigated and determined as to whether or not them continuing whatever it was they were doing, whether it was cutting the grass or putting in a garden, or whatever it may be—it can be a cumbersome process for them while they're waiting for the determination of whether or not they can continue to do whatever it is. But overall, the people in my area, and the people all over Windsor, are very proud of the fact that we have some incredible wildlife in our area that you won't see anywhere else.

So when the news came that the Liberal government of the day was going to shut down our racetrack, and they were going to bulldoze it and sell it off for development, that in itself was a blow to the community. It was a big blow to the community. I can't tell you how many jobs were lost, how many horses were put down, how many horse people had to move out of our area. If I remember correctly, the only large-breed vet who specialized in horses actually moved out of our area. He serviced all of the surrounding communities around Windsor and Essex, and he moved out of town. It was a huge blow to our area when the Liberals closed the racetrack. Then we sat around and watched a private

developer come in and bulldoze that very important piece of our community and our history.

So when the word came out that this developer was going to put in a big-box development—word is that it's going to be, at some point, a Walmart. When the word came out that there was going to be this development, this big-box development going in, which was going to generate a great deal of traffic, traffic that we didn't see around the racetrack—at the racetrack, there were lots of people who would go there. Lots of tourists would come and go to the racetrack, play the slot machines, watch the horses and enjoy the atmosphere of the racetrack. But it didn't generate the type of traffic that we are going to see if a big-box retail store is built on that location. So when the word came out that, potentially, we were going to get a Walmart or a big-box retail store built there, many members of the community—not just people who live in that area but people from all across Windsor and Essex county—started ringing alarm bells. Because not only are you going to see an increase in pollution from the number of people travelling in that area—the neighbouring community, the folks who live in that particular neighbourhood, are going to see more traffic through their neighbourhood—but very importantly, it's putting that wildlife, those endangered species, at increased risk as more and more people start to come down that road, looking to go shopping at whatever the store ends up being.

We had some community members who started sounding the alarm bells. They came forward and said, "We think this is wrong. We want you to hold off. Let's do a study. Let's get the municipality involved and see if there's something else that we can do to preserve the wildlife in this area"—and, frankly, to keep it for beautification, to continue the beauty that is Ojibway Park, to perhaps make that area even larger.

As these individuals came forward and started sharing with the community what they've heard and sharing their concern, more and more people were getting on board with the idea of protecting the area. More and more people understood the importance of not creating this large development where we were putting these animals, these endangered species, at risk.

In fact, Dr. David Suzuki came down and visited. He too said that it was a mistake for this developer to go ahead with what they had planned to do and that what they needed was the province to step in. I have raised the issue, my colleagues have raised the issue—I'm on the record raising the issue. In fact, I believe the Save Ojibway community group that was formed said that I was the first-ever provincial politician to stand in this House and raise the issue officially. So we are on the record showing our concerns over the issue and now we have Dr. David Suzuki, who takes a trip down to Windsor; he had lived in the area for a while. He recognized the importance of Ojibway Park and he lent his voice to the cause and said that it would be a mistake not to in some way try to mitigate the potential damage that this big-box retail development is going to cause to the area and to the wildlife.

A suggestion was brought forward that the street that runs between the park and this proposed development maybe gets closed off so that people can't travel that way; they would have to come in off the expressway and come in through the front way, and only come in that way, rather than the smaller road on the back side. That was something that this group proposed. It's not that they were saying, "Don't build." I think ideally that's what they would have liked, that you don't build this big-box retail store there, something that we probably don't need there. What they said was, "There is a problem that's going to be created by this and so we are coming to you with solutions, and one of the solutions would be to close that street."

They started this campaign. More and more people were getting on board and understanding the importance of the park and preserving the wildlife. As this happened, of course, there were rallies and small groups of people getting together. There was leafleting and there was more information being put out and there were social media campaigns. In my opinion, Speaker, it was all done in a very respectful manner. Unfortunately, the developer didn't agree with the fact that these private citizens who were raising valid concerns about the surrounding area—again, I want to point out, it's not just them; Dr. David Suzuki came down and said it too. There have been plenty of experts who have lent their voice to the cause of preserving Ojibway Park and the surrounding area so that the wildlife is not further put in danger.

What happened was, this developer then took these private citizens, two ladies in particular, before the OMB and went after them for an incredibly large amount of money—money that these women would never have been able to pay. It was a drop in the bucket for the developer. They could drag them through court all day long. They could afford to do that and they were determined to do that, all because two women raised concerns, started a campaign, respectfully raising concerns about Ojibway Park. In the end, the developer did win. They didn't get what they wanted completely. They did win. They were awarded costs.

Before my time is out, I want to mention that as soon as that award, that decision, came down, my community came together and started a GoFundMe page, and within days raised enough to pay all the legal expenses of those two women. Nobody in our community, no private citizen in our community, supported the fact that a developer with endless resources and endless money was able to take two individuals before the OMB—women who had valid concerns—and that it ended up costing them as much as it did. That shouldn't be happening, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Hon. Bill Mauro: I want to thank the member from Windsor West for her comments. There have been a couple of comments made by other speakers, as well, about the length of time to bring reform to the OMB. Bill 139 is, in fact, a very significant reform of the existing

structure of the OMB, but it's not the first reform that, as a government, we brought forward.

1750

It's an opportunity for me to highlight a piece that I don't think is well known across the municipal sector in the province of Ontario, and that is that in 2006 or 2007—I could be wrong on the year—we legislatively created a structure called local appeal bodies. What that did was, it enabled municipalities to create a body within their municipal organizations that had authority to hear planning matters on I believe it was consent and variances. So if a municipality, since about 2006 or 2007, wanted to, they had the legislative authority to do that. No municipalities—not one—took that up until just this past spring, when the city of Toronto, for the first time, created a local appeal body in their community. It may not sound like much, but I think two or three years ago, in one of those calendar years—2015, 2016, something like that—approximately 60% to 70% of matters from the city of Toronto that ended up at the OMB could have been dealt with by a local appeal body. But the city of Toronto, up until this spring, like all other municipalities in the province of Ontario, had not undertaken the legislative capacity that they were enabled with some six, eight, 10 years previously.

So there was reform that was brought forward, Speaker, and many planning matters that ended up at the OMB did not have to end up at the OMB. Local appeal bodies were enabled by our government, local municipalities could have undertaken them and built them, and they could have prevented many planning matters from ending up at the OMB, but they had chosen not to.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Ross Romano: During my time as a city councillor in Sault Ste. Marie, before taking this position, I was a member of our local community's conservation authority in the Soo.

Listen, I'm happy to stand here and say that there are much-needed reforms to the OMB process. I agree with that wholeheartedly. I think the difficulty is the way in which this is being canvassed at this stage, and the way this is being, quite frankly, rammed down our throats.

The situation is this: We do need reforms, but we are concerned about the way this is being proposed. This government—we want to politicize. I'm sure I'm looking forward to hearing the voices that are going to come out. But this government is continuing to ignore the voices of Ontarians. When this was initially put forward, there were supposed to be four days of hearings. There were going to be 69 groups that had applied to speak, and over 50 of them were shut out because this thing was reduced. Why was it reduced? Why was the time sped up in order to get this to a conclusion? Why is it that while we look at this legislation, we're looking at numerous pieces? Why isn't every single piece given the attention it deserves, singularly, to be looked at? Why are we looking at them in a blender like this? Well, it's because they're trying to push things through, because they're afraid they

don't have the time to get them through. So it's this kitchen-sink approach—just throw everything at us in one bill. I think it's very wrong. I don't think it's fair, and I think—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you. The member from Parkdale—High Park.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's a pleasure to comment on the remarks by our member from Windsor West. She's a tireless advocate for her community and for all of our communities in what she says and, of course, what she does.

She touched on the issue of climate change. This is critical. It's critical for folk who are listening to understand that, sadly, our government has blown its targets where climate change is concerned. Our Environmental Commissioner has said this in report after report over the 11 years I've been here. Every single time, we're missing out; we're not hitting them. And what are the results of that? The results of that, of course, are the kinds of natural disasters that they saw in Windsor—flooding etc.

As Chair of the estimates committee, I was shocked to hear when the Ministry of Energy came before us, grilled by our own environment critic, the member from Toronto—Danforth. Clearly there wasn't really a plan for climate change. There was no money set aside for the results of climate change. There was no disaster relief program set into place.

This is just going to get worse. It's not just going to be Windsor; it's going to be all of us who are going to experience in our ridings the effect of climate change against our wildlife, against our humans, against our property, against everything. We need a program to address that, and we need a plan to address it. Certainly in the Ministry of Energy I didn't get the sense that there was any plan forthcoming at all.

I remember there was a disaster relief commission in Toronto—this is going back a number of years—that burned to the ground. It was kind of a black joke. Luckily, nobody was hurt. But we need better, and we need it now.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry.

Hon. Kathryn McGarry: It's a pleasure to rise and add more comments to the member from Windsor West. I just wanted to say again that the consultation was extensive throughout Bill 139. For instance, there were over 12 public town halls and there were online comments for the OMB over many, many months. The Conservation Authorities Act review was two years in length, when we heard from literally hundreds across the province. But Ontario and its conservation authorities continue to look after and ensure that natural resource management continues to protect our property and our folks.

For instance, in 1974, there was a big flood in downtown Cambridge, and the Grand River Conservation Authority came along and made some improvements, with a living levee down through there. When the water level this past spring was as high as it was in 1974, that

held and there was no flooding in Cambridge at that point. These programs are essential in looking at enhancing flood control, erosion control and water hazard management control.

Our proposed bill is going to clarify the objectives of conservation authorities and the programs and services they provide: for instance, creating a new regulation that outlines the roles and responsibilities in water-related hazards, such as flood forecasting; reviewing planning documents for consistency with the provincial policy statement; supporting Ontario's new Wetland Conservation Strategy; and looking at regulations that outline standards and requirements regarding climate change mitigation and adaptation, which is a part of what the wetland strategy will do.

But we're also proposing to enhance technical guidance related to flood hazard management mapping and considerations—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you. The member from Windsor West has two minutes.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Thank you, Speaker. I'd like to thank the Minister of Municipal Affairs, the member from Sault Ste. Marie, my colleague from Parkdale—High Park and the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry.

To sum it up in two minutes, the bill before us proposes that municipalities consider climate change issues when developing their plans, which is all well and good if they have the funding to do it. There is nothing in

this bill that speaks to actually supporting municipalities in a financial way, to make sure that they're able to follow through on what this legislation is going to make them do. It will be impossible for municipalities to ensure that their conservation authorities are complying with the changes in this legislation, again, without giving them the support they need through additional funding.

I cannot tell you enough that all we have to do again is look at my area, and what the people in my riding and in all of Windsor and Essex county have gone through twice in less than a year. We had a once-in-100-years storm twice in under 12 months. You cannot continue to download responsibilities to municipalities without giving them the financial resources to deal with those responsibilities. That is irresponsible as a government. It solves nothing. It doesn't help our conservation authorities when you put more rules on them and you don't give them the resources to follow them, and we certainly don't want to see what my colleague from Welland was talking about, where you have a conservation authority that is running roughshod over the area and doing whatever they want, seeming to be unaccountable.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you.

Third reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): It being 6 o'clock, this House stands adjourned until 9 o'clock tomorrow morning.

The House adjourned at 1800.



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Kwinter, Monte (LIB)	York Centre / York-Centre	
Lalonde, Hon. / L'hon. Marie-France (LIB)	Ottawa–Orléans	
Leal, Hon. / L'hon. Jeff (LIB)	Peterborough	Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / Ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels Minister of Francophone Affairs / Ministre des Affaires francophones Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales Minister Responsible for Small Business / Ministre responsable des Petites Entreprises
Levac, Hon. / L'hon. Dave (LIB)	Brant	Speaker / Président de l'Assemblée législative
MacCharles, Hon. / L'hon. Tracy (LIB)	Pickering–Scarborough East / Pickering–Scarborough-Est	Minister of Government and Consumer Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux et des Services aux consommateurs Minister Responsible for Accessibility / Ministre responsable de l'Accessibilité
MacLaren, Jack (IND)	Carleton–Mississippi Mills	
MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean–Carleton	
Malhi, Harinder (LIB)	Brampton–Springdale	
Mangat, Amrit (LIB)	Mississauga–Brampton South / Mississauga–Brampton-Sud	
Mantha, Michael (NDP)	Algoma–Manitoulin	
Martins, Cristina (LIB)	Davenport	
Martow, Gila (PC)	Thornhill	
Matthews, Hon. / L'hon. Deborah (LIB)	London North Centre / London-Centre-Nord	Chair of Cabinet / Présidente du Conseil des ministres Deputy Premier / Vice-première ministre
Mauro, Hon. / L'hon. Bill (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Atikokan	Minister of Advanced Education and Skills Development / Ministre de l'Enseignement supérieur et de la Formation professionnelle
McDonell, Jim (PC)	Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry	Minister Responsible for Digital Government / Ministre responsable de l'Action pour un gouvernement numérique
McGarry, Hon. / L'hon. Kathryn (LIB)	Cambridge	Minister of Municipal Affairs / Ministre des Affaires municipales
McMahon, Hon. / L'hon. Eleanor (LIB)	Burlington	Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry / Ministre des Richesses naturelles et des Forêts
McMeekin, Ted (LIB)	Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Westdale	Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport / Ministre du Tourisme, de la Culture et du Sport
McNaughton, Monte (PC)	Lambton–Kent–Middlesex	
Milczyn, Hon. / L'hon. Peter Z. (LIB)	Etobicoke–Lakeshore	Minister of Housing / Ministre du Logement Minister Responsible for the Poverty Reduction Strategy / Ministre responsable de la Stratégie de réduction de la pauvreté

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Miller, Norm (PC)	Parry Sound–Muskoka	
Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East–Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est–Stoney Creek	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Moridi, Hon. / L'hon. Reza (LIB)	Richmond Hill	Minister of Research, Innovation and Science / Ministre de la Recherche, de l'Innovation et des Sciences
Munro, Julia (PC)	York-Simcoe	
Naidoo-Harris, Hon. / L'hon. Indira (LIB)	Halton	
Naqvi, Hon. / L'hon. Yasir (LIB)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	
Natyshak, Taras (NDP)	Essex	Minister of the Status of Women / Ministre de la condition féminine
Nicholls, Rick (PC)	Chatham-Kent–Essex	Minister Responsible for Early Years and Child Care / Ministre responsable de la Petite enfance et de la Garde d'enfants
Oosterhoff, Sam (PC)	Niagara West–Glanbrook / Niagara-Ouest–Glanbrook	Attorney General / Procureur général
Pettapiece, Randy (PC)	Perth–Wellington	Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Potts, Arthur (LIB)	Beaches–East York	
Qaadri, Shafiq (LIB)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	
Rinaldi, Lou (LIB)	Northumberland–Quinte West	
Romano, Ross (PC)	Sault Ste. Marie	
Sandals, Hon. / L'hon. Liz (LIB)	Guelph	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Sattler, Peggy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock	
Sergio, Mario (LIB)	York West / York-Ouest	
Smith, Todd (PC)	Prince Edward–Hastings	
Sousa, Hon. / L'hon. Charles (LIB)	Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud	President of the Treasury Board / Présidente du Conseil du Trésor
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto–Danforth	Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances
Takhar, Harinder S. (LIB)	Mississauga–Erindale	
Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain	
Thibeault, Hon. / L'hon. Glenn (LIB)	Sudbury	Minister of Energy / Ministre de l'Énergie
Thompson, Lisa M. (PC)	Huron–Bruce	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming–Cochrane	
Vernile, Daiene (LIB)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	
Walker, Bill (PC)	Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound	
Wilson, Jim (PC)	Simcoe–Grey	
Wong, Soo (LIB)	Scarborough–Agincourt	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
Wynne, Hon. / L'hon. Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	Deputy Speaker / Vice-présidente
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke	Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales
Yurek, Jeff (PC)	Elgin–Middlesex–London	Premier / Première ministre
Zimmer, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB)	Willowdale	Leader, Liberal Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti libéral de l'Ontario
Vacant	Bramalea–Gore–Malton	
Vacant	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation / Ministre des Relations avec les Autochtones et de la Réconciliation

**STANDING COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
COMITÉS PERMANENTS DE L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE**

Standing Committee on Estimates / Comité permanent des budgets des dépenses

Chair / Présidente: Cheri DiNovo
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Michael Mantha
Mike Colle, Nathalie Des Rosiers
Cheri DiNovo, Michael Harris
Ann Hoggarth, Sophie Kiwala
Michael Mantha, Arthur Potts
Todd Smith
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Eric Rennie

Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs / Comité permanent des finances et des affaires économiques

Chair / Présidente: Ann Hoggarth
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Han Dong
Yvan Baker, Toby Barrett
Mike Colle, Han Dong
Victor Fedeli, Ann Hoggarth
Harinder Malhi, Cristina Martins
John Vanthof
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Eric Rennie

Standing Committee on General Government / Comité permanent des affaires gouvernementales

Chair / Président: Grant Crack
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Granville Anderson
Granville Anderson, Yvan Baker
Grant Crack, John Fraser
Lisa Gretzky, Sam Oosterhoff
Lou Rinaldi, Lisa M. Thompson
Soo Wong
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Sylwia Przedziecki

Standing Committee on Government Agencies / Comité permanent des organismes gouvernementaux

Chair / Présidente: Cristina Martins
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Daiene Vernile
Granville Anderson, Lorenzo Berardinetti
James J. Bradley, Wayne Gates
Cristina Martins, Sam Oosterhoff
Randy Pettapiece, Shafiq Qaadri
Daiene Vernile
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Sylwia Przedziecki

Standing Committee on Justice Policy / Comité permanent de la justice

Chair / Président: Shafiq Qaadri
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Lorenzo Berardinetti, Nathalie Des Rosiers
Amrit Mangat, Jim McDonell
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Ross Romano, Monique Taylor
Daiene Vernile
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Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly / Comité permanent de l'Assemblée législative

Chair / Président: Monte McNaughton
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Laurie Scott
Robert Bailey, James J. Bradley
Joe Dickson, Sophie Kiwala
Amrit Mangat, Michael Mantha
Monte McNaughton, Laurie Scott
Soo Wong
Committee Clerk / Greffier: William Short

Standing Committee on Public Accounts / Comité permanent des comptes publics

Chair / Président: Ernie Hardeman
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Lisa MacLeod
Bob Delaney, Vic Dhillon
Han Dong, John Fraser
Ernie Hardeman, Percy Hatfield
Randy Hillier, Monte Kwinter
Lisa MacLeod
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Katch Koch

Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills / Comité permanent des règlements et des projets de loi d'intérêt privé

Chair / Président: Ted McMeekin
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Lou Rinaldi
Granville Anderson, James J. Bradley
Grant Crack, Jennifer K. French
Jack McLaren, Ted McMeekin
Lou Rinaldi, Mario Sergio
Daiene Vernile, Bill Walker
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Christopher Tyrell

Standing Committee on Social Policy / Comité permanent de la politique sociale

Chair / Président: Peter Tabuns
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Lorne Coe, Bob Delaney
Vic Dhillon, Joe Dickson
Harinder Malhi, Gila Martow
Ted McMeekin, Peter Tabuns
Monique Taylor
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Jocelyn McCauley